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FACILITATOR PRESENCE: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Steve Dilworth

Bournemouth University 2008

Thesis - Doctor of Professional Practice

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ABSTRACT
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STEVE DILWORTH

My thesis has a dual focus. It is an account of both the journey of my inquiry, and the outcome of that inquiry. The Professional Doctorate, for which this work is submitted, emphasises practice development and at all times I have kept a watchful eye on my progress towards becoming a '*scholarly professional*'.

I am a facilitator – this means taking a variety of roles, including group leader, supervisor, coach, mentor, change agent. I use the term 'facilitator' as shorthand for all of these.

My thesis makes a contribution to practical knowledge in relation to the subject matter and the methodology. My main focus is the practice of group facilitation, especially the way that a facilitator can work in a distress free manner, when the presence of the facilitator is apparent and distinct through an individual signature. I take the optimistic stance that facilitator presence can be developed, and have gathered a range of ideas that may support the practitioner in this respect, predominantly drawn from my own experiential and theoretical learning.

With regard to autoethnography, the issue of judgement criteria is a particular offering. I see the whole of my thesis as autoethnographic, and have navigated a fine line between doing autoethnography, and finding out what an autoethnography is. In fully committing to this methodology, I take on the responsibility of writing from my own experience, whilst incorporating insights from the work of predecessors and peers.

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I am indebted to John Heron and his life work, which was the stimulus for my initial inquiry. Heron's work provided a rich source of support and challenge to which I returned on many occasions during my formal period of study.

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INTRODUCTION

Preamble

This document is a representation of my journey rather than a factual account. Any chronology inferred needs to be set in context, in that the events and consequent understanding did not really happen in the neat order that my thesis may suggest. As with more tangible journeys, there was a beginning point - a place and time when the decision to set off crystallised. There is also an end point, signified by this document. In writing this thesis I have endeavoured to show the work in which I have engaged between these two fixed points. In the presentation of this thesis, submitted for formal evaluation in relation to a doctoral award, my inquiry takes a pause. I recall reading a comment that film scripts are not representative of the way people really speak to each other, they are created in that way to help the viewer to understand the plot of the film. In a similar vein I have written with an intention to support the reader in making enough sense of my inquiry.

My work has evolved throughout the course of the Doctor of Professional Practice (DProf) and my aim at the writing-up stage is barely recognisable when set next to my original intention, submitted at the outset of my study. At that time, I articulated my intended research focus as an inquiry into deliberate, planned or intentional change and I hoped to discover much about the what and how of such types of change in order to apply this learning to my practice as a change agent. My study plan was clear, definite and based on the four key components outlined in the DProf course literature, about which I will say more later in this document.

I have been reassured through sharing my experience with others. Discussions with my DProf peer group suggested that taking a wide diversion from the initial direction of research is commonplace. Furthermore, several colleagues within the group concurred with authors such as Chaim Noy in confirming the tendency for this transition:

“... it can hardly be imagined that such a work would (or should) develop precisely or even approximately along the proposed lines. And so, slowly but surely, the dissertation began drifting away from its proposal. To my protests and growing anxiety I realized that if someone would have looked at these two documents—the earlier, preceding and binding one (the proposal) and its consequence or result—only a loose connection, if any, could be found linking the two.”

Noy (2003: 4)

It may be that in the fullness of time my current aims will prove to be a prototype for work that I carry out later in my life. I do not anticipate the thesis to be the end of the story, though I am pleased to present my considered thinking to date, which has grown both systematically and organically over a four-year period of inquiry.

In the Beginning

In the beginning were a few words that I found whilst reading a key text on the nature and practice of facilitation. These words were ... distress free authority. My inquiry began in earnest when my attention and imagination were captured by this single phrase, articulated by John Heron, whose work I deeply admire. He talks of distress free authority as a criterion for excellence that facilitators would do well to aspire to and therefore endeavour to develop and apply to their professional practice. I was drawn to consider this phrase very deeply within an inquiry that has been set in the related contexts of the professional doctorate journey on which I was embarking and my work as a facilitator. I have explored the matter in detail, experientially and intellectually, in my heart and in my head. I have considered it in relation to my own work and to that of many colleague facilitators whom I regard as my informal community of peers.

Heron (1989: 139) includes distress free authority as one of the seven criteria by which you may judge a facilitator to be competent. For the record, the other criteria relate to the ability to:

- confront supportively

- provide clear conceptual orientation
- care
- have a wide repertoire of techniques
- respect fully the autonomy of the person
- have a flexibility of style

Heron sets out these criteria in the spirit of development and suggests that facilitators could consider them as one basis on which they may fashion their own style of facilitation. He also notes that there are some aspects of a person who facilitates that are not directly subject to such developmental approaches. These characteristics are:

“ ... like a person’s signature in action. It is not acquired or created. It just becomes more fully revealed as behaviour becomes more and more authentic.”

Heron (1989: 136)

I will return to the notion of the facilitator signature later in this document and consider the distinction between characteristics that may be subject to development and those that emerge from within the person.

All of Heron’s criteria noted above are important to me in my work as a facilitator but I have focused on those few words that drew my attention in the beginning. The ability to be distress free is expressed in the following extract where Heron elaborates his insight and presents it as the first of his criteria of excellence:

*“... in the light of which you would judge a facilitator to be competent ...
Authority: You have distress free authority, and do not displace your own hidden pathology through your interventions.”*

Heron (1989: 139)

As I began to inquire into the question of whether a facilitator could develop such authority in their work with groups (and if so how) I made a series of notes in my journal that helped me to scope my inquiry and gain an initial sense of direction. This was the first of many unexpected changes in my inquiry. The thoughts I expressed at this stage appeared to be taking me

away from the notion of distress free authority and towards its experiential opposite! Instead of considering the meaning of distress free I was becoming enmeshed in the notion of distress. The way in which I experienced and managed this change will be clarified as my thesis develops.

My detour began with the following journal note:

In relation to facilitator distress I think I need to clarify the following points:

- *The idea of facilitator distress emerged from my own experience of facilitating outside my comfort zone. The change from Heron's distress free authority may be a natural one when set in this context.*
- *To a degree there has never been a comfort zone! The idea that I may be responsible for enabling the development of others has always seemed a little absurd.*
- *However, this is what has earned me a living. Repeat business has been the norm.*
- *Over a period of time it has become of interest to me how I sometimes manage to contain my feelings whilst at other times they seem to be all consuming.*
- *As I prepare for a piece of facilitation work I feel the paradox of being the paid facilitator*
- *I am (am I?) expected to contain the 'distress' around the group and especially to be in control of myself enough to carry my authority in the 'Heronian' distress free way.*

Journal – 13/12/04

This emergent interest in facilitator distress was reinforced by my increasing realisation that there are times in my own practice when I cannot claim to be distress free. As I facilitate I regularly experience a chronic background noise; a hum floating back and forth as a vague awareness that occasionally breaks through to my conscious mind. This distress has rarely been so acute that it leads to stage fright or freezing but it is very familiar to me. I know it as one might know a close but rather difficult friend.

At times the experience of distress can become manifest as a frantic inner voice seeking to quell the troublesome situation but ultimately aggravating the difficulty. Anyone familiar with the television situation comedy, 'Dad's Army',

will recall the character of Corporal Jones played by Clive Dunn. The Corporal was a member of the Home Guard, a voluntary body of people who were to be a first line of defence against an invasion of Britain during World War Two. Jones was famous for dashing up and down at the first sign of trouble, shouting, "Don't panic!" I am familiar with my own psychological version of Corporal Jones, and recognise him as one of the cast of internal characters that frequents my mind.

At a less dramatic level than panic I have had countless experiences of butterflies in my stomach when facilitating or anticipating a piece of work with a group. I recognise that whether I label these feelings as *anxiety* or *excitement* depends on a complex array of circumstances and conditions that I expose, to some degree at least, within this thesis. A key factor to consider when facilitating is to ensure that I take responsibility for any distress arising within me and especially to avoid displacing any of my own hidden distress onto the group. As this feeling emerges there may also be an accompanying attempt within me to deny the distress. In practical terms this may all mean that I need to find ways to manage what I am feeling privately, without necessarily disclosing this to the group. Paradoxically it can also mean sharing those feelings with confidence that such self-disclosure is appropriate.

And so ... the notion of distress free authority that had at first intrigued me began to trouble me. The fundamental shift I had made from the criterion of excellence in Heron's work was now occupying my thoughts as a problem or difficulty. I instinctively decided to pursue this shift and to make facilitator distress the new focus of my inquiry as I was perplexed about the reason for this development and curious as to whether it was possible to reverse the change and return to a positive stance.

My instincts were supported as I noted a great interest in my inquiry, from facilitator peers, whatever their vocational origin or organisational context. As I talked, so my professional colleagues nodded and I recalled the fable I once heard about the Sufi sage, Mulla Nasrudin. When asked how he became so wise he responded by saying that he had gone through a period of talking a

lot and that every time he noticed someone nodding at what he said he wrote it down!

My own period of talking a lot was accompanied by a prolific period of writing. I will elaborate on the writing experience a little later in my thesis, as this has been a central component of my research approach. Many potentially fruitful questions appeared in the stream of my consciousness that flowed from pen to page. I wondered about the real meaning of authority. Could it be something about authorship, in the sense of writing? Should I look more closely at authenticity in the light of the apparent common etymological root with the word authority? What about my personal and professional experience as a male, a Dilworth, a father, a nurse, coach, facilitator, supervisor, mentor or any other role I have occupied? Should I acknowledge my desire to find my distinctive voice, my idiosyncratic way of being within these roles? These and many other questions occurred to me throughout the process of the doctorate and have intrigued me. I do not propose to fully address all of these questions; they are noted here simply to demonstrate some of the possible directions I could have taken.

At the outset of my inquiry I imagined that I would study the issue of distress free authority through the experience of other people. This was not to be the way that my work developed and I soon realised that I must fully consider what it meant to me, within my own practical experience. I wanted to go beyond creating a description of facilitator and became more interested in discovering, or at least shedding light on, what enables and what disables the facilitator, what causes distress, and what, ultimately, may promote distress free authority. As time went by it became increasingly obvious that I was inquiring into my own experience as a facilitator and my decision to pursue autoethnography as the correct methodology for my inquiry is embedded in this realisation. This development in my thinking will be explored later in this document.

My focus on self-exploration can be seen in the light of Guignon (2004) who explores the well-known phrase spoken by Polonius in Shakespeare's

Hamlet, *“To thine own self be true”*, and comments that this may more properly be understood when seen in the context in which it is spoken.

“When we look at Polonius’ words ... we see that he is thinking of being true to yourself not as an end in itself, but as a means to some other end. ‘This above all: to thine own self be true’, he says, ‘And it doth follow, as the night the day, /Thou canst not then be false to any man.’ What the injunction tells us is that we should be true to ourselves in order thereby to be true to others; there is no suggestion that being true to oneself is valuable in its own right.”

Guignon (2004: 26)

Guignon thus draws attention to and underlines the connection between learning and serving with which I have grappled throughout my thesis. This is particularly obvious in the section on practice development where I both distinguish and merge professional development (usually thought of as individual) with practice development (usually thought of as collective). There is also a clear intention, within the Kaleidoscope section of my thesis to share the learning gleaned from my inquiry. I consider this to be an essential element of a professional doctorate.

As already stated, this inquiry began with a focus on distress free authority, which then became inverted and become facilitator distress. There was however to be a further, crucial shift when my thoughts metamorphosed and I began to consider the concept and practice of facilitator presence. I increasingly inquired into ways to develop a state of presence in the art and practice of facilitating. It gradually occurred to me that the ability to be present may be a natural consequence of being distress free and so a practical question emerged: how might one do presence?

Whilst presence may not be most appropriately considered as a verb I do refer to the idea of presencing later and have also considered the notion of presence as a state of being. It could be that there are (at least) three complementary strands, which combine in the act of excellent facilitation: knowing, doing and being. The gradual shift in the process of my inquiry unfolds in the next section where I outline the key questions that helped me to move forward.

Key Questions

I am struck by the work of Patton (2002) who has written a comprehensive text on qualitative research. He occasionally provides commentary on his work through the use of a character he refers to as Halcolm. Patton prompts his readers to read the name Halcolm quite slowly, in this way it sounds like 'How come?' This character is:

" ... a qualitative inquiry muse and Sufi-Zen teaching master who offered stories that probed the deeper philosophical question of how we come to know what we know – or think we know ... " In short, Halcolm is *" ... part muse, part alter ego, part literary character and part scholarly inquirer."*

Patton (2002: A1)

I like the way that Halcolm encourages the would-be researcher to make a personal connection with their proposed area of study:

"Newton and the apple. Freud and anxiety. Jung and dreams. Piaget and his children. Darwin and Galapagos tortoises. Marx and England's factories. Whyte and street corners. What are you obsessed with?"

Patton (2002: 5)

Two particular questions emerged to help me to elicit my obsession and on which I could focus. These were:

- 1) (How) may a facilitator develop and maintain distress free authority and therefore presence?
- 2) What judgement criteria can be applied to autoethnography?

With regard to the first question I note that the role of facilitator may be relatively new in the way that it is understood today, but it is probably a concept that has been around for as long as human beings have gathered together as groups. From time to time someone is appointed and/or trusted, by the group, to mediate discussion regarding issues of mutual interest. I focus particularly on the issue of whether, and then how, such a facilitator may be able to overcome any sense of distress stimulated by their work,

especially when this occurs during the event. I emphasise the point that the degree of success in combating distress seems to correspond to an increased ability to develop presence. I will say more about the terms distress, distress free and presence, and how they relate to facilitation as the thesis progresses.

Given my intention to go beyond exploring book knowledge and into exposing my own experience of taking the role of facilitator my choice of methodology is at the heart of my second key question. I have been intrigued by the whole field of autoethnography and noticed an early determination arising within me to thoroughly consider how such a piece of work can be judged, especially when presented for assessment within the academic world. I explore some of the challenges of using self in research, especially where self is integral to the methodology used. I note my own concern about whether this sort of work can be claimed as research and adopt a use of language that is intended to be a bridge between academic and practical concerns. For example, I have increasingly preferred the term *inquiry* to *research* and have also utilised the concept of comprehensive review instead of adhering to the conventions and boundaries demanded by engagement in systematic review.

Above all I have made practice development the key concern of my thesis and in this decision I place some emphasis on the importance of knowing how (to practice) rather than merely knowing what (the theoretical position may be). My thesis aims to show ways in which practical knowing can be achieved and is, in my view, entirely consistent with the rationale for the creation of professional doctorates. The following section sets the scene in a little more depth and is intended to help the reader to comprehend the inquiry as a whole.

What can be expected from this thesis?

In view of the structure that a doctoral path demands, in which there must be some sense of finality, my work pauses at this point. I am certain that this thesis would develop further if I had limitless time to continue my inquiry, although paradoxically, unlimited time may result in never ending prevarication. As a compromise, given my limits of both time and capacity, my words should at all times be seen as provisional. I have heard from others who have completed such a process, who say that this ending often signifies a new beginning. Sometimes the real question is found at the supposed end of the period of inquiry and I find comfort in the words ascribed to the Jains, an ethically orientated religious group, who use the word 'syat' to emphasise the ongoing process of discovery. This means:

“ ... to the best of my knowledge at this time ... ”

Stevens (1984: 20)

In the context of this general philosophical position I outline what the reader may expect from my thesis as three particular themes:

1. The Phenomenon

My inquiry has focused on my own, lived experience, within the sub-culture of facilitation. I briefly describe facilitation, and then pay particular attention to the sub-phenomenon of distress free authority whilst increasingly focusing on the presence of the facilitator - the concept that became the central concern of my scholarly journey and an essential aspect of my practical/professional journey. I explore those things that disturb presence and how a facilitator might identify and overcome these perturbations, using examples from my own practice to illustrate both distress laden and distress free facilitation.

I reflect on whether such disturbances would in fact be more usefully accepted as part of the experience of facilitation and should be anticipated and managed rather than being seen as problems that need remedial action. I particularly hope that my work will help to develop insight into facilitator

presence whilst also creating early warning signposts to things that disturb or prevent such presence.

My thesis emphasises ways in which a facilitator may develop practice, throughout the many stages of facilitation, from contract to completion. I pay attention to the principle that disturbances may occur at any stage in the process of facilitating. At the contracting phase, for example, one may ignore an instinctive feeling that there is something about the proposed work that does not feel right. Later on in the process the disturbance may be more tangible when, in the moment/experience of facilitation, an unanticipated turn of events can be highly disruptive to the equilibrium of the facilitator. I also emphasise the value of reflection after the event as a vehicle for learning from the experience of being disturbed, using the past as a guide to the future.

I see presence as a state of being rather than a stage of development and do not think it is possible to arrive at an ability to be present once and for all. I do however suggest that once presence has been experienced and recognised it may be easier to return to that state. This suggestion is based on my own experience and following discussion with peers. Ultimately I want to share ideas that may enable the facilitator to be present and I have drawn together, a kaleidoscope of such ideas in a separate section towards the end of the thesis. The kaleidoscope is a metaphor that emerged quite early in my doctoral work and endured the many other changes in my thinking to become a separate and key component section of my thesis.

2. The Methodology

My Doctoral journey has been intensely personal and the resulting narrative is drawn from daily immersion in my life and work as I have engaged in a prolonged inquiry into facilitation from my perspective as a practising facilitator. I was content to be indecisive in the early part of my inquiry, not committing to any potential or promising methodology, keeping my powder dry just in case a better one turned up!

My methodological choice had its roots in hunches that needed further thought along with consideration of alternatives. When I eventually made my decision to commit to autoethnography I noted a concurrent need to take the consequential academic and personal responsibility to explain my thought process.

The spark that lit my commitment to autoethnography occurred when I attend a Masterclass on the subject and realised that this was the path that I was already tacitly following. I realised that there was no need to separate out my explorations into the discrete sections articulated in the DProf programme literature that I had originally considered as mandatory. I believe that all of my work is autoethnographic and my autoethnography includes many aspects of my learning. In particular I show my presence within the research journey itself as well as providing an account of my presence as a facilitator. I see these two aspects as inseparable and it is in this context of (w)holism that I have constructed my inquiry and the consequent thesis.

3. The Link between Phenomenon and Methodology

In relation to methodology I include a detailed account of my exploration of the art, craft and science of autoethnography and consider the range of approaches that are recognisably autoethnographic in order to say where I am situated within this continuum. With regard to the phenomenon at the heart of my inquiry I use examples from my experience and reflections on my practice of facilitation throughout my thesis.

At first my approach seemed to me to contradict the requirements of the DProf but eventually it proved to be entirely consistent. My thesis shows my transitions through stages of indecision, faltering, tentativeness and commitment. I did not anticipate all of the twists and turns I was to confront as my inquiry continued. However the clarity of intention that flowed from my methodological decision gave me an important guiding principle and a coherent sense of direction. As the research proceeded not only did the subject matter become clearer but also my primary methodology of

autoethnography was increasingly underpinned by a variety of supportive methodologies. I have drawn upon heuristics, ethnography, phenomenology, bricolage and narrative. I explore all of these methodologies later in my thesis.

The phenomenon that drew my interest and the methodology that became my core approach are inextricably intertwined in that this is an autoethnography that inquires into, explores and describes my own experience of the practice of facilitating groups. The source material (data) is therefore highly autobiographical and yet the final thesis is not an autobiography.

The DProf Four

I have been conscious of how differently my work was emerging to how I had originally anticipated that it might. I have also been mindful of the required format laid down in the Programme Handbook. Ostensibly the Professional Doctorate (DProf) navigates a path that should include four interrelated yet ultimately distinct pieces of work. I have characterised this requirement as the DProf Four and summarise the components as follows:

- 1) A final thesis based on original research
- 2) A systematic review, that offers meta-synthesis or meta-analysis of previous work.
- 3) A detailed account of a practice development project
- 4) A narrative report that connects the other three pieces.

Whilst it may be reasonable to expect a neatly packaged document with a place for everything, and everything in its place I have instead chosen to allow the story to unfold. I present this emergent account in a way that fully honours doctoral level requirements **and** represents the inquiry more authentically than I believe it would by simply following the artificial split suggested by the DProf Four. The course documentation states that:

“Students will present a thesis consisting of four pieces of integrated work ... “

Institute of Health and Community Studies (2002a: 12)

My complete work addresses and integrates all four of the component requirements of the DProf within the convenient container of just one of them ... the narrative that is my autoethnography. The other three components have jostled for attention in the maelstrom of my daily life and this has involved grappling with how to incorporate and integrate the relevant material elicited during my intense and personal immersion in the field of inquiry. Practice development, comprehensive review and the research - all are inseparable, yet each one is distinct, integrated within a coherent whole. All are revealed as notable themes within a complex web of ideas rather than a series of artificial segments.

A key example of the shift in emphasis from the apparent confines of the four components to the development of a creative (and more appropriate) synthesis was at the early stages of writing up my thesis. At this point I was prompted by my supervision team to consider the applicability of the term systematic review to my inquiry. The idea of a comprehensive review was suggested as an alternative and this immediately struck me as being more relevant to my work.

At all points in my inquiry there have been opportunities to review the work of practice and academic predecessors and contemporary peers and my attention to such pre-existing work has taken many practical forms such as supervision, reflection, journal writing, professional discussion, and attendance at many and varied learning events. The consequent impact on the whole document is that my review is threaded into all sections of the thesis rather than confined to a solitary chapter. It is on this basis that I claim my review to be comprehensive.

Practice development is also an integral part of my work in general and for different reasons could therefore not be easily separated within my thesis.

Overall this means that the section entitled comprehensive review has an explicit flavour of practice development and the practice development section becomes a narrative account rather than a project report. The original research is at the heart of every section.

Unturned stones

There are of course stones unturned in this inquiry. Where possible I have noticed and acknowledged any omissions although I anticipate that readers will see more. Decisions not to take potentially useful detours may even be an expectation at this level though I trust that I have turned enough stones and that any gaps, decided or unintended, are not crucial. Any errors of omission in my work are not intentional, and may be inevitable, but I have tried at all times to proceed with due caution, mindful of the notion that:

"We don't see things the way they are. We see things the way we are."
The Talmud

I accept the potential for limits in my thinking and am impressed by the way that Michael Quinn Patton sprinkles his work with the thoughts of the imaginary character Halcolm, introduced to you earlier in this document, as a way of maintaining alertness to such personal limitations. The Halcolm question (i.e. 'how come') could be posed at many points to inquire into the way my thinking has developed. One example of this is where I state my prioritisation of practice development whilst also claiming that my thesis is inclusive of all four DProf elements. I suggest that my work as a whole can be seen as a sustained, systematic and studious focus on the business of practice development. I provide many illustrations of my own developing practice and intend my work to be supportive of the development of others, through the sharing and co-creation of knowledge. This priority is entirely consistent with the philosophy underpinning the Professional Doctorate as a genre of academic qualification:

"The Doctor of Professional Practice programme aims to prepare 'scholarly professionals' and is a practice oriented professional degree ... It is directed towards generation of new knowledge but also to

systematic analysis, transmission and application of existing knowledge to develop practice in ways that are at the forefront of the disciplines.”

Institute of Health and Community Studies (2002b: 5)

I am keen on the principle of learning together, in the spirit of co-creation of knowledge. My thesis offers an extensive record of my journey as a researcher and a writer whilst simultaneously inviting the reader to be a companion who may engage in a parallel and distinct journey of their own. Noy (2003) points to a way of presenting such work that does not attempt to tie up all the loose ends or claim, prematurely, to be the last word on the subject in hand. He prefers a creative structure and explains that:

“The complementary notions of ‘ambiguity’, on the one hand, and ‘openness’, on the other hand, suggest quite a different hermeneutic frame for narrative inquiry: a combination/ contamination of genres that continuously evolve, and inspire new meanings, between writer and reader ...”

Noy (2003: 3)

Hermeneutics relates to the way in which a researcher may seek and expose the message contained within the text of documents and I elaborate on this key research term in a later section. Given that this particular text has largely emerged from within my self, the hermeneutic question has continuously evolved and is the essence that forms my thesis. I hope that the prolonged message from my own lived experience may resonate with others.

Addressing Potential Objections

I am aware that some may question the validity of this type of research and discount the approach I have taken. Indeed, my awareness of the potential for others to dismiss such work began early in the process of my inquiry as I noticed and noted metaphorical raised eyebrows when articulating the possibility that my work may be an autoethnography:

“Many social science academics object to the way it blurs the lines between social science and literary writing.”

Patton (2002: 86)

Some writers are particularly direct in their critique, for example Crotty (1998) criticises qualitative research in general and autoethnography in particular. He seems concerned to ensure that objectivity of research should not be compromised and suggests that studious efforts that seek to use creativity are of key concern in the field of qualitative research:

"Bringing objectivity and subjectivity together and holding them together throughout the process is hardly characteristic of qualitative research today. Instead, a rampant subjectivism seems to be abroad. It can be detected in the turning of phenomenology from a study of phenomena as the immediate objects of experience into a study of the experiencing individuals. It is equally detectable in the move ... to supplant ethnography with 'autoethnography'."

Crotty (1998: 48)

I found these objections, ranging from unspoken concern to frank opposition, to be very discouraging and responded by moving away from this criticism and attempting to find a more mainstream approach in which to locate my studies. Later sections of my work provide a deeper sense of how autoethnography re-emerged as my chosen methodology and how both a phenomenological perspective and an underlying heuristic spirit support my work. My eventual methodological choice seemed to be the most logical at my disposal and I took this option in the knowledge that it may be dismissed or labelled as irrelevant or even self-obsessed.

On a more hopeful note I have been reassured by my experience throughout the period of inquiry during which my thinking has been informally assessed through the resonance of colleagues who have shown great interest as I spoke about my inquiry. On many occasions I have recounted tales from my personal and idiosyncratic journey to a wider audience, and found that colleagues listening to my deliberations understood what I was striving to articulate. I gained strength from this sense of experiential rapport and trust that expressing my findings as a whole, including a series of practical ideas, may help others to share my learning and that this may repay a little of the educational and psychological debt of gratitude that I owe to all those who have helped me to learn.

With this in mind I include a Kaleidoscope section towards the end of my thesis that is intended to provide a myriad of possibilities that may be useful to my community of facilitator peers. I have used the metaphor of a kaleidoscope as it suggests a constantly changing image. Each time one looks through the eyepiece and turns the dial a variation in the pattern of colour picture will emerge. It is dynamic rather than static; alive at all times with new ways of approaching the ideas, rarely if ever returning to precisely the same form.

My Kaleidoscope section also draws together some key elements of my own process of lifelong learning that is implicit and explicit in my work. My work as facilitator in a range of settings and using a variety of titles such as coach, supervisor and reflective practitioner is a lived experience of practice development, or at the very least, an intention to develop my practice.

This practice development cannot be shown as one or two exemplars as the thesis itself is the overarching exemplar. However in the particular matter of facilitating with (or without) distress and therefore with more or less presence I offer a series of examples of how my practice has developed without making the dishonest claim to have arrived at a total and predictable ability to be fully present at all times.

One such practical example has been my co-facilitation (with Jeremy Keeley) – he and I developed and delivered several open programmes for colleagues who are also facilitators. These workshops are entitled 'Facilitator Distress and Presence', the details of which I expand upon later in this thesis.

In claiming that my own practice has developed through the process of my inquiry I recognise that this is inextricably related to the act of producing a thesis that is required at doctoral level. Indeed a key component of my own development is in the way I have utilised an emergent process of writing. The next section is intended to give the reader an early insight into the creation of this non-linear, organic and ultimately integrated piece of work that is my autoethnography and therefore my thesis.

About the Writing Process

I have created and taken many practical steps to help me to continuously and comprehensively elicit a meaningful account. I have spent many months patting my writing into shape, going back and forth between the data and my account in a prolonged attempt to join the dots and enable a coherent picture to appear from seemingly random points on a page.

I enjoyed the writing up process, experiencing the slow but definite evolution of what it was that I wanted to write and forming this into my doctoral thesis. The nature of my inquiry, focused as it was on exposing my internal experience, needed the act of writing to help me to create an external form that may make sense to others:

“ ... ex-expression – pressing of our experience outward to some tangible form ... ”

Guignon (2004: 67)

There was a great act of faith involved in staying with the internal search, always trusting that the words would follow. This faith emerged very early in my inquiry and was supported by my methodological choice and encouraged by those close to me who listened as I tried to describe my progress and offered guidance when appropriate.

I want to use the DProf to draw together the strings in my head ... my mind is like a bag of knitting after a visit from a litter of kittens ... Separate the threads slowly and with great focus and determination.

Journal - 17/11/04

One of the key pieces of advice I had from my academic supervisors was to write as much as possible, throughout the period of inquiry and from the very beginning. This has proved to be invaluable and one of the foundations of my autoethnography has been the disciplined spontaneity I have practised by writing three pages by hand every morning, on waking. I engaged with this

task for prolonged periods of time following the suggestion made by Cameron (1995) who recommends strict and daily commitment to:

“... an apparently pointless procedure ... the morning pages are three pages of longhand writing, strictly stream-of-consciousness ... simply the act of moving the hand across the page and writing whatever comes to mind. Nothing is too petty, too silly, too stupid, or too weird to be included.”

Cameron (1995: 10)

The way that this technique gives access to thoughts that lay just under the ground of consciousness has been enormously helpful in allowing me to move on in my thinking and practice. I have recommended use of this to several clients, most of whom have found it to be useful. In essence the technique allows the writer to access their stream-of-consciousness, a term that can be defined as a:

“ ... narrative technique ... intended to render the flow of myriad impressions – visual, auditory, physical, associative and subliminal – that impinge on the consciousness of an individual and form part of his awareness along with the trend of his natural thoughts.”

Encyclopaedia Britannica Online

I eventually adapted this technique by introducing a deliberate focus. In particular I came to the daily task with an alertness to my ongoing inquiry into facilitation and an intention to bring forth, on to the morning pages, a record of my thinking that was based on my concurrent experience in this professional field. Striking a balance between allowing words to emerge in a free flowing and natural way and holding a clear intention to apply rational thought process appealed greatly to me. The results are analogous to the field notes of the ethnographer and became crucially important when I was deliberating on appropriate sources of autoethnographic material to include in my thesis.

Cameron (1995) supports creating such a balance between control and spontaneity in that she strongly suggests using the morning pages as a way of helping individuals locate and develop their artistic and creative talent. She underlines the requirement for some discipline:

“Morning pages will teach you that your mood doesn't really matter. Some of the best creative work gets done on the days when you feel that everything you are doing is just plain junk. The morning pages will teach you to stop judging and just let yourself write.”

Cameron (1995: 12)

She sets this encouragement in the context of learning how to override, manage and ultimately silence the internal censor that may attack any attempts to write. I will return to the idea of an unhelpful, and at times, vicious inner critic later in my thesis as this directly relates to my experience of facilitator distress.

Using my own experience of facilitation in particular and of life in general, making this experience explicit and gathering my research material as a dynamic, personal activity underpinned the re-emergence of autoethnography as my main methodology. My thoughts on this key decision gradually emerged from within me, through the medium of the morning pages. I noted the work of Virginia Woolf who was asked to write on the subject of women and fiction. In response she wrote an extended essay, based on her own stream of consciousness, that she entitled, 'A Room of One's Own'. Woolf explained how she had opted against simply expounding her knowledge of famous woman writers. She stated that in order for a woman to be in a position to write she must have the financial means and a room in which she can write. Within her work she begins by posing the rhetorical question:

“ ... you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction – what has that got to do with a room of one's own?”

Woolf (1929:3)

In sympathy with Woolf, I do not want to merely show how supposedly learned I may be on the theoretical aspects of facilitation. There is a deeper rationale for the work of the DProf, for example it is important to me that the reader can recognise that my words ring true.

I note how many research reports conclude with more questions than answers and that authors seem content to point towards a need for further research. I have also seen that research, once accepted as factual, is superseded as

new data emerge. Whilst the general purpose of a Doctoral thesis is to report on original research I can see how my own work shares the sense of partiality and tentativeness alluded to above. I have chosen the word inquiry as a way of signalling my concern about research in general and my own claims in particular. The key source of data has been my own experience and I fully accept the challenge of convincing the reader that this is a valid, coherent and consistent thesis that meets all the criteria of the DProf. However I am equally determined to show that my work is internally coherent, consistent and honouring of the principles of the methodological choices I made.

There may be a tension in straddling the requirements of academia and autoethnography without falling through a gap between the two. I accept the implicit element of risk in the spirit of creativity and in taking this intentional approach to writing my thesis I also accept as a truism that one cannot take a risk without taking a risk. If I am serious about the need for creativity in my work, and indeed in the art and craft of facilitation, then a degree of courage is important. My initial concern about this tension is noted in my journal:

I think that autoethnography will leave me too vulnerable to criticism.

Journal – 15/4/05

Alan Alda encouraged a group of students, including his daughter, with the following extract from a speech he delivered at their graduation ceremony:

“Be brave enough to live creatively. The creative is the place where no one else has ever been. You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition. You can’t get there by bus, only by hard work and risk and by not quite knowing what you’re doing. What you’ll discover will be wonderful ... yourself.”

Alda (1980)

This is a helpful sentiment in that it seems to me that any risk in respect of the above is not only worth taking but is also essential to my development. In particular my presence should be recognisable throughout my writing and given that this whole thesis is fundamentally about the development of

presence as a facilitator it would be incongruent if it were artificially absent from this process of writing. Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper (2001) express this presence most eloquently:

“We are very mindful that many academic books adopt a rather aloof style that seems to be aimed at no-one in particular. Indeed, in some texts it is very difficult to find any signs of human life whatsoever ... we attempt to speak as directly as possible (given the rather impersonal medium of the book) to you.”

Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper (2001: xii)

Adopting a creative style whilst also attempting to write with clarity, from me to you, has meant tolerating a degree of confusion and messiness that has been a hallmark of my writing process. This in turn is typical of my experience of facilitating that is sometimes likened to the difficult task of trying to herd cats! I began writing on my first day of the Doctoral programme (and probably before) and I ended it on the day of my submission. I have no doubt that I could have continued tweaking the work and that later attention to sections of the whole thesis will manifest in several other ways at a later date. Walsh (2007) seems to have been to this place of messiness some time before me:

“ ... I am led to question my approach to managing ‘mess’, and indeed my need to manage it ... a degree of messy thinking is indeed useful as structured, organised thinking can limit creativity.”

Walsh (2007: 16)

This quote from Liz Walsh alerted me to the work of others who are supportive in suggesting that confusion is a positive sign. For example:

“Embrace ambiguity, contradictions and your bewilderment. Treat bewilderment as a sign that you are entering the phenomenon. Through struggling with ambiguity and bewilderment you may sense hidden meanings and gain a deeper understanding.”

Charmaz (2004: 981)

Similarly my old friend and mentor, Gretchen Pyves, used to suggest that *“confusion is the threshold of enlightenment.”* I have used my confused thinking as the baseline for my thesis. The accompanying uncertainty has been gradually filtered and filleted, blended with and supported by the work of others and tangential to the work of so many more, published and

unpublished. I am indebted to other qualitative, and in particular autoethnographic, researchers who have encouraged me to believe that my double-edged aim of discovering new ideas and simultaneously sharing learning accrued may be possible. I believe that this proximity to the learning means that I am better placed to:

“ ... present my findings – not to ‘re-present’ someone else’s.”

Senge, et al (2005: 99)

This aspiration has meant a need to engage with the requirements that I perceived to be imposed by the DProf Four, as described earlier in this document. I fully resolved this difficulty as I began the process of writing the final thesis and it was a relief to conclude that my autoethnography was to be a complete narrative account rather than an uncomfortable collection of pieces. Even after this shift in my approach there were times when I severely doubted my ability to create a structure that would show appropriate sections, a beginning, ending, abstract, introduction and conclusion whilst somewhat paradoxically holding the thesis as a single document. As I patted my words into shape at one end the other side seemed to be pushed out of place.

In order to manage this struggle I created a temporary framework of sections as a tentative list of contents that provided scaffolding to support my developing structure. This list was ultimately transformed into a more logical progression of contents and the final version should enable readers to move easily to and between those sections that may be of particular interest to them. The structure remains loose in the sense that I do not believe that this work needs to be read in a linear way, from front to back, and I have had many internal discussions on running order, some of which I allude to later in this document.

As my writing emerged I wondered whether it would be most appropriate to present my work in the past or present tense and concluded that the last draft would be the place to decide. I anticipated that I would then have a clearer idea about the extent to which I had answered my two key questions and a sense of how the whole was indeed more than the sum of the parts. The end

result is a combination of past and present and includes many signposts to the future that I trust to be coherent even though it may not appear to be consistent.

A further element of my writing style that I have taken into account relates to the use exclamation marks, to emphasise certain points to which I am particularly attached, either consciously or not. I have paid attention to times when I have deliberately or unconsciously removed or sidestepped questions that needed addressing, especially where I may have used or inferred exclamation marks.

Whatever the gaps and difficulties I can say that engaging in writing throughout the research process, rather than as an act of completion, has been invaluable and I thoroughly recommend this to others, although I do understand the temptation to wait:

"I had been taught, as perhaps you were as well, not to write until I knew what I wanted to say ..."

Richardson and Adams St. Pierre (2005: 960)

The value of this ongoing process of engagement became clear as I looked back on my morning pages during the writing up stage of the thesis. I cannot over-emphasise the usefulness I found in committing to the morning pages. The discipline that was initially an extra task to be squeezed into my already tight morning schedule became a peace giving friend allowing me to express my disorganised thoughts before gradually realising the deeper organisation beneath the chaos. I noticed (and noted) repeating thoughts and was surprised by occasional glimpses of clarity that grew and became my thesis.

As I sit and write I notice that a calming process occurs. My eyes become a little more open and my mind stills from the clutter.

Journal – 26/03/05

This experience of an emergent organisation of my thoughts continued throughout the more formal period of writing up my thesis. The pieces of the

jigsaw could now be joined together to complete a picture. Each draft became more coherent and, to continue the jigsaw metaphor, it was as if I started at the edges and began by working on the easy sections. I struggled from time to time wondering if I even had the right pieces. In time I was able to distinguish between subtly different pieces (the sky or the sea!) and that development of sensitivity within the task has enabled me to complete the puzzle.

Writing Opportunities Lost

Along the way there were writing opportunities that came and went. For example I would have preferred to create a jointly written section on Systematic Review or Practice Development that addressed the scope or definitional element of these terms. This could have been written by the cohort of Professional Doctorate students of which I was a member as we all had to grapple with the question of what a systematic review might be before proceeding to our own approach. A collaborative effort, bringing together all of our learning, would have been so much richer and was a lost opportunity to challenge the orthodox academic position that seems to insist that a thesis is an individual effort.

I feel that there was scope in the DProf to reconsider this assumption and note that this expectation that there will be a single author for each thesis is in stark contrast to the plethora of collaborative academic studies to be found in the literature at large. There may be:

“ ... an inclination in academic circles towards single authorship ... vehemently and orthodoxly observed ... the dissertation can hardly be even imagined as co-authored or co-composed ... at the heart of the academia writing a dissertation and graduating is a form of an institutionalised rite of passage or, better, rite of institution.”

Noy (2003: 7)

Another example of how a co-created account would have been fruitful is with regard to methodology. I have only provided a brief overview of phenomenology whilst I know that my DProf colleagues have looked much

more deeply into the work of several key phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Husserl. It is with some regret that I note the lack of energy I expended in pursuing further collaboration beyond the extremely supportive and stimulating impact of the cohort meeting for group supervision. The practical result is that my thesis is weaker than it may have been.

On a more positive note, the very act of engaging with and writing this thesis is of great significance to my own developing practice and I have noticed an interesting parallel in my current work. One example that is pertinent is my work with two psychotherapists. When I discovered that they were engaged in some innovative joint work I asked if they were writing about it and the answer was no. I offered to listen to their story and feed back what I heard in writing. They were so pleased with the first draft that they were stimulated to engage fully in their own writing, and this combined work has resulted in submission for publication.

This vignette also encapsulates a theme running through my inquiry, that my own development is inextricably linked to others, my role as a facilitator is a manifestation of this and I am now finding ways to use my writing ability to offer a new string to my bow. With all of this in mind I will present my thinking on practice development as the first key section of my thesis that will provide a fuller insight into my autoethnographic approach.

PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT – A PRINCIPLE, A PROJECT ... OR SIMPLY A WAY OF BEING

Overview

Throughout my career, and my life in general, a key concern has been, and continues to be, how I might learn things that are useful. I have never been attracted to knowledge for knowledge's sake (although I do confess a sneaking admiration for students on University Challenge who seem to retain an amorphous mass of detail on a vast range of subjects).

I am struck by how often I discover something new, only to find that others have been there before me. I have often noted a synchronicity between considering a new thought and finding a reference. In the course of the DProf I have even noticed how on several occasions I have written something that I thought was original only to find the same idea in my own earlier journal entries. I have come to believe that most of my own new learning is drawn from the old learning of other people, and it is therefore prudent to remember this when claiming originality. I do however hope that my thesis will provide new insights into the practice of facilitation and the principles of autoethnography given the general purpose of the Doctorate qualification to extend the body of knowledge. Given that this is a Professional Doctorate I resonate with the following assertion that:

"One certainty is that practice development is concerned directly with the world of practice and hence it is not our intention to academicize it."

Manley and McCormack (2003: 22)

My inquiry relates to professional development in the widest possible sense rather than practice development that may be limited to a particular context.

Some authors suggest that:

"Professional and practice development is a continuous process ... despite being inextricably linked the two areas are distinct: the former is concerned with knowledge, skills and values and the latter with how these are used to provide good quality patient based care."

Mallett, et al. (1997: 38)

I am deliberately merging the two concepts in the light of my professional role, which takes me across a range of care settings and far beyond, as I facilitate groups within many organisations and services in commercial, public and voluntary sectors. My breadth of experience has made some of the literature on practice development appear limited, and therefore of questionable relevance to the broader context of my work, in that most of the literature that I found was focused on application to healthcare settings. I do however note that there is a detectable shift in favour of this term being applied to other care settings:

“Over the past couple of years it has been acknowledged that the philosophy, principles, tools and techniques associated with PD are relevant to all professional and non-professional bodies, teams and organisations working within health and social care sectors.”

McSherry and Warr (2008: vii)

I have been encouraged by this recent literature in that the position of facilitation is strongly recognised by McSherry and Warr (2008) as crucial to the process of practice development. These authors emphasise a facilitative approach to team working, along with collaboration and partnership, in order to encourage, enable, engage and enlighten groups of people in practice settings to actively develop the service that they perform. I think that this aspiration is applicable in many settings.

At the start of my inquiry I began experimenting with a particular shift in my professional life. Almost all my work until that time had been in the public and voluntary care sectors, capitalising on my wide experience in the NHS but I was now beginning to seek, and find, work in commercial organisations. At that time my underlying rationale for this shift was a desire to find different ways of looking at problems. I hoped to draw on the experience of working in sectors and organisations that are quite different from what I was used to and I intended to apply any fresh ideas to my work within the NHS at a later date. I am beginning to find ways to do just that and it is in this progress that I detect and claim that professional and practice development are intertwined.

The initial impact on me of this change of working environment was somewhat surprising to me in that my early attempts to facilitate in these new organisations provoked strong feelings of distress that had a profound effect on my ability to be present to the groups in question. I note that I hadn't really considered the extent to which my skills at that time were transferable to other settings, away from my comfort zone of the NHS. I suspect that if I had thought this through I would have concluded that they were not transferable, useful or wanted and it may have been this lack of confidence that fuelled my sense of distress.

"The difficult point about any sudden loss of direction, any fear that holds us back from new territory, is that we begin to think that we may be frauds, that everything that led up to this experience may have been manufactured ..."

Whyte (2001: 155)

I have since discovered that this was a limitation in my own thinking and I now have an increasing portfolio of experience, with evidence arising from this work, which suggests that fruitful cross over is possible.

On one occasion I was working away from home on a two-day workshop. I felt so distressed that I seriously considered going home at the end of the first day. I was working with an excellent colleague who enabled me to stay, but a trace memory of the feeling can still evoke in me the same sense of discomfort that I felt at the time. Of course it wasn't the first time I had experienced distress in a group. In the past I had gradually learned to trust feelings as they arose within me and if I feel a change in my level of anxiety as I am facilitating I usually pay attention to that change and often use the experience creatively and explicitly in the group. At times my own feelings point to some aspect of the group process that may not yet be expressed or even conscious.

I have also learned how to simply notice changes in my emotional state that seem to be related to my own personal/professional needs, i.e. not necessarily related to the group process. In these circumstances I take these experiences to supervision at a later date. I call the technique of consciously

noticing an issue whilst also leaving it for later attention – ‘*putting a flag in it*’. This is one of a number of ideas that facilitators may find useful in developing their ability to discern what may be about the group and those issues that are the responsibility of the facilitator.

As this section on practice development unfolds I will show how my thinking moved from the mechanistic to the holistic. I include an account of my sincere attempt to develop a practice-based project, on which I expected to report as part of my thesis. I then take the reader through the stages of my own thinking that culminates in an approach that is, in my view, much more consistent with the methodological and philosophical stance on which my thesis is based. To set the scene I outline my scan of literature regarding some of the wider principles.

Definitions – A Principle

Practice Development is a concept that has spawned a rich seam of descriptive literature within which writers vary in their emphasis on different aspects whilst attempting to clarify the general concept. As I indicated earlier use of the term practice development is often limited to healthcare settings, possibly because health professionals coined the term. One example from this context is:

“Practice development may be seen as an approach that synthesises activities and theory of quality improvement, evidence-based practice and innovation in practice, within a real-practice context, and with a central focus on the improvement of care and services for patients and clients.”

Page and Hamer (2002: 6)

I am particularly drawn to the principle of service encapsulated in this definition. From the perspective of my own practice as a facilitator, I always maintain a clear focus on the eventual beneficiary. In healthcare this is usually the patient, but may also be the staff member or group responsible for providing a service, where this is not directly patient focused, e.g. in the case

of human resources professionals. In my work in other sectors the recipient of the service or product may be a passenger or customer.

Corinna Dickson (2006) notes the prevalence of studies seeking to address the question of definition. She carried out an extensive literature review on practice development in healthcare settings, using sources from 1999 to 2004 and notes a list of attributes that are:

“ ... the most commonly agreed essential ingredients to make practice development work ... ”

Dickson (2006: 2)

This list includes the need for:

- Collaborative, open and flexible teamwork with shared ownership, vision and philosophy
- Life-long learning with a particular emphasis on evidence-based practice through education, training, research and development that combine to encourage innovative practice
- Patient focused services where patients (and staff) feel empowered
- Continuous attention to quality of service and accountability of staff.

All of these elements are said to contribute to an area of practice where development can flourish. The practical alchemy it takes to create this blend may be a little more difficult to articulate.

Within my own practice there are certain principles I regard as my trademarks. The key principles that I adhere to include the notion of lifelong learning that always seeks to build on existing good practice - an openness to new ideas is thereby balanced with a respectful attention to history. These principles seem to align well with the literature on practice development. Lifelong learning requires much more than chronological experience; for some people 20 years of experience may mean 20 years of doing the same thing, with no particular signs of them developing as individuals.

The development of the individual as a corollary to the wider emphasis on developing the area of practice is noted in a recent work:

“The importance of focusing on self is important because without exploring our own strengths, weaknesses and areas for growth and development how can we share and learn this with others?”

McSherry and Warr (2008: 95)

These authors outline a series of components that are an excellent framework of supportive and developmental structures for every professional including the practising and developing facilitator. The components that make up such a framework include:

- Codes of professional conduct
- Continuing professional development in the context of lifelong learning
- Reflective practice, statutory and non-statutory supervision, mentoring and preceptorship
- Research awareness
- Critical companionship, networking, team building
- Action Learning
- Leadership awareness and organisational analysis techniques
- Evaluation methods

I will revisit this framework later in my thesis as part of the Kaleidoscope Section, which brings together a range of ideas that facilitators may draw upon to support their development. The next section describes my initial attempt to enact such principles within the context of a project.

Practice Development – A Project

The definitions, principles and parameters above gave me a basis for my initial work on the Practice Development element of the doctorate. I did not feel the need to report on a particularly successful piece of work, as success is not the only criteria to meet in relation to the Dprof. In the event this was not the issue as I realised that my successful project was not particularly

relevant to the inquiry in which I was engaged. I will clarify this point later in this section.

My original intention was to conform to the academic parameters outlined within the course documentation. I selected one piece of Practice Development from my professional life as a doctoral project. I had recognised an issue, collaboratively formulated an intervention and followed that intervention through to a conclusion, before reviewing the impact. The project brought together professionals from several disciplines and had a strong service user focus. The work related to development of services for people with mental health problems when they are simultaneously clients of Accident and Emergency Departments, particularly following incidents of self-harm. The project results were incorporated into some of the services that were involved and a successful piece of practice development was completed.

The Director of Nursing and Modernisation, Peter Hasler, endorsed this success in a letter of thanks to me in which he stated that the final report represented:

“ ... an excellent piece of work that I am sure will influence future strategy within the Trust.”

(Personal communication 26 September 2006)

This report became the central plank on which my Transfer Document and Viva were based and enabled me to cross the transfer threshold and proceed along the Doctoral path.

It would be possible to claim that I had engaged in a systematic approach to practice development in that there was a simple process underlying my work and the report arising was a decent representation of a successful piece of work that was directly linked to an important national agenda and supported by a regional service development organisation and a large NHS Trust. It included the new experience, for me, of bidding for funding.

I realised that something was missing and in my attempt to make my project more academic I searched for appropriate support from the literature regarding the conditions in which practice can flourish. The list developed by Dickson (2006), referred to in the section above, is a helpful template to guide practice development. However, I made this judgement of usefulness retrospectively, at the writing up stage of my thesis – claiming to have followed this guide contemporaneously is therefore inappropriate.

Despite the apparent success of my work I remained dissatisfied with the use of this project for doctoral purposes. At around the time of my transfer viva this concern appeared in my stream of consciousness journal, thus:

The transfer document becomes a (very) dry run, a real enabler. I chose that practice development project just because I had to choose one. I can forge a link, or even force a link, but this is not where my energy lies.

Journal – 12/05/06

Two key reasons underpinned my concern that I was forcing a link:

- 1) My professional life has been dedicated to practice development for more than two decades, initially as an employee within a large NHS organisation and for the last decade as a freelance practitioner. I have been involved in countless projects in support of the development of individual, group/team and organisational practice. My claim to have completed the practice development component of the DProf was therefore an exaggeration in that I experienced the work as business as usual and facilitated in more or less the same way that I have for many years.
- 2) I noted my struggle to authentically create a doctoral element from this project and felt that to take one piece of practice development arbitrarily and **doctorise** it for some purported academic gain eventually seemed to be **doctoring** in the most negative and euphemistic sense of the word. I could have extended the literature search and threaded learned comments

through the final report, but ultimately it struck me that it did not meet my own standard in relation to the practical nature of the DProf, which emphasises the development of the scholarly professional rather than the professional scholar.

This is a key point in relation to my whole inquiry. I am committed to making a contribution to facilitation as a scholarly professional. Learning from and using experience has always been a crucial component of my practice and I see the way in which professional judgement is based on much more than theoretical knowledge. Despite this experiential reality I have observed a way distance between practitioners and academics throughout my professional life, and am therefore pleased that the vision and philosophy of the DProf is grounded on finding ways to link academic studies, at a Doctoral level, with the realities of practice:

“Synergy of both professional and discipline development seem to be at the heart of professional doctorates. The traditional heart of the PhD is shifting from research training as its main purpose to professional development in practice”

Galvin and Carr (2003: 304)

The professional doctorate is designed to support the practitioner through recognition of the need for professionals who are knowledgeable doers. This is not necessarily an easy academic route in that know how can be seen as a lesser discipline:

“Applied activities have usually suffered this kind of elitist condescension from the academic world on the grounds of, ‘If you can’t describe it, how can anyone know you can do it?’ In short, it doesn’t value that ability to do things half so much as the capability of explaining how those things are done.”

Taylor (2004: 40)

As I reconsidered the way in which my doctoral education was balancing theory and practice I realised that the project I had engaged in was not particularly relevant. I began to wonder how my practice development (as a facilitator) could be reasonably and realistically represented without either over-academicising the report or in some way undermining the value of my

experience. I wanted to be both explicit and consistent about any advance in practical knowledge within my thesis.

This ongoing thinking enabled me to clarify my growing objections. The initial outcome of my Transfer Viva included a request by examiners for further clarification, and I dutifully obliged. I now wonder if the lack of clarity evident in my original submission was a manifestation of the sense of incongruence that I was unable to articulate at the time.

As I worked through my misgivings about the project I realised that at the heart of my work is a desire to know how to do presence, in the sense of being present when I facilitate. I do not think that it is enough to simply explain, describe or quantify the concept of presence using theory disconnected from practice. I want to know how to be most present in all of my work as a facilitator and hope that if I articulate this with clarity then I, and other facilitators, may be able to apply this to practice. This is the real essence of my autoethnographic approach to practice development.

At about the time that I was grappling with this issue Bryce Taylor sent me some draft work in preparation for the publication of his work on 'Whole Person Learning', Taylor (2007). I was invited to be a reader in the creation of a new book entitled 'Learning for Tomorrow', written as part of an international initiative regarding globally responsible leadership. The author is Bryce Taylor (2007), who reflects much of my own thinking in relation to presence, facilitation and learning. His draft work contained several relevant points, one of which I use here:

"Know how is the terrain where most individuals have most of their accomplishments, yet it remains the area least valued in our educational system."

According to B. Taylor (personal communication, Autumn 2006)

In relation to facilitation the concept of know how is particularly pertinent to relationships, usually within a group setting. The relationship between the facilitator and those facilitated is pivotal. Application of 'know how' to facilitation therefore has a fundamental concern with beginning, building,

maintaining and utilising relationships in the context of a generally shared goal of development. I believe that people will only be facilitated by consent. Attempting to facilitate others, even in the name of some worthy development of practice, requires the facilitator to step into the maelstrom of relationships. Taylor once again offers support, asserting that:

“Relationships are, of course, a ‘know how’ domain. No matter how well a person understands the importance of ‘empathy’, for example, if they do not display it it’s not much use in their relationships, even though it may well help them to pass academic examinations about relationships ...”

According to B. Taylor (personal communication, Autumn 2006)

In my view it is this relationship, between facilitator and facilitated, that can help to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Knowing how to relate to group members and helping them to relate to each other could be seen as a core skill of the facilitator, and it is in this respect that academic knowing can count for nothing. If I know all there is to know about facilitation and do not know how to develop relationships when facilitating then I suggest that it is unlikely that the group I am working with will successfully achieve their aim.

I acknowledge that there are times when a group can get on with their task in spite of the efforts of the facilitator, but that would be the grounds for another thesis entirely! In short, practice development in the context of my thesis must address the interactive and relational aspects of my practice as a facilitator.

Of course the relationship between facilitator and facilitated is not the only relationship of importance. The myriad of interrelationships between group members, often collectively termed as group dynamics, may have a significant impact on the facilitation process. I believe that the more a facilitator can remain present, and in conscious control of his or her own distress, the more able they will be to notice and act on the group dynamics present within the group. This in turn will make it more likely that the group will be functional and able to achieve their aim. I will elaborate on the concept of group dynamics in a later section

And so, focusing on 'know how' became increasingly important as my scholarly path continued. I endeavoured to relate the interaction between my own sense of theoretical knowledge and the practical activities of facilitation. My emerging focus on the concept AND practice of presence in the work of a facilitator is for me the epitome of this indistinct boundary. Given my professional role I realised that the general concept of facilitation is clearly personal to me and that my inquiry would therefore be subjective. I needed to inquire into the essence of my facilitation in the context of the professional sub-culture of peer facilitators to which I belonged. This inquiry remains at the heart of my doctoral studies and hence autoethnography is my methodological base.

My own experience of facilitation was the essential starting point rather than an additional, and possibly interesting, source of alternative data. This was a baseline from which I could most confidently reach out to professional peers and possibly a wider audience.

The ongoing question of how to engage in a practice development project that was set within an autoethnographic framework was the key issue. From this methodological perspective, practice development and the underpinning foundation of research, became my way of life. This commitment was supported by my passion to develop practice: a central motif in my work. The question of how to convey this in autoethnographic fashion was the challenge that I accepted and I began to develop a convincing argument for an alternative approach to practice development.

Autoethnographic Perspective – A Way of Being

I began to see that:

“ ... amid the complexities of the world, exactly what we have, exactly our experience, is the only place we can start. Of course this is just the beginning. Everything must be tested against that same world in which we live; there is a long hard road to mastery.”

Whyte (2002: 255)

I started to trust my professional instinct and stopped trying to convert my practice development project into an academic report. Instead I committed to drawing out and articulating the way in which my practice has evolved through this prolonged inquiry into my experience of facilitation. I gradually included attention to the impact of my work, gathering feedback from those I facilitated in order to assess my claims to have developed.

Making sense of my developing practice has been sustained and discernible throughout the time I have engaged in the DProf. For example my initial interest in distress free authority and the subsequent shift from this to the notion of facilitator distress is linked to my discovery, abandonment and eventual rediscovery of autoethnography. This process was not a moment of profound disorientation but a prolonged period of trying to become orientated.

In some ways my educational needs could be likened to those of a participant taking an advanced driving course – or any situation where people of experience begin to search for the next level of learning. There is a moment when one is faced with the limits of ones current ability or knowledge. This may interrupt the flow of the experienced learner, creating within them a sense of conscious incompetence. This realisation is a change from the state of unconscious incompetence and can be both sudden and difficult. The impact of this shock may last if the learner is not prepared to accept the reality of the situation and work towards new and deeper understanding.

In my own experience practice development has usually arisen as part of an evolutionary process. Whenever I embark on any learning journey, I anticipate that it will be uncomfortable at times. As a result of this acceptance I usually experience a reasonably gentle and subtle gain in knowledge (knowing what and knowing how) rather than a Paulian epiphany. There may be moments when I suddenly seem able to do something new or to notice that an existing ability may be better than before, but this is not a common part of my experience.

Within this expectation of slow but definite learning I developed a clear approach to practice development that demonstrably relates to my methodological influences. As I clarified and articulated my thinking, I recognised two key phases in my approach to practice development, which could be thought of as pre- and post- autoethnographic. In reality, phase two began long before phase one had ended but I only fully accepted this after the transfer viva.

Phases of Autoethnographic Practice Development

Phase One – A Decided Phase – Pre-Autoethnographic

To recap, my early thinking was based on the requirement to clearly identify practice development within the DProf. Given that practice development is my business, it was not difficult to select a juicy piece of work as an appropriate project and this is outlined in the section above entitled 'Practice Development - A Project'. This was a substantial piece of work that was to take several months to complete. I was sure that it would include new learning for me as well as having clear objectives for the project group to achieve.

From an autoethnographic perspective I realised that this was a gap in my project - the extraction and display of evidence of my own developing practice as a facilitator was missing, and there was scant evidence of the impact on

those facilitated. My growing sense of dissatisfaction was the wellspring from which a methodologically appropriate approach to practice development grew.

Phase Two – Autoethnographic (with a heuristic influence)

The second phase was both autoethnographic and heuristic. At this stage I think it is sensible to take a detour from the plot of my narrative to give particular mention to the work of Clark Moustakas who coined the term Heuristic Research, which he defines as a:

"Process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience ... The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge."

Moustakas (1990: 9)

The combination of autoethnography and heuristic research is quite natural given that both involve the personal immersion of the researcher into the inquiry at hand. A spontaneous recognition of the general direction that the research will take arises from this immersion. This in turn requires a balance of attention between immersion in the work and maintaining a watchful eye, ready to note any progress and record this, with appropriate evidence. This dual state could be likened to that of a resting cat, fully relaxed yet always alert. My immersion utilised several strands, as follows:

1. Reflection
2. Activity
3. Application and evaluation

1. Reflection

Reflecting on what I have done and considering future options have been key components of my professional life for as long as I can remember. I have engaged in monthly supervision for at least two decades as an important

corollary to my professional work. This enables me to take time to stop and think, away from the heat of practice and receive support and challenge regarding my thoughts and actions.

It was to this established routine that I added academic supervision, provided as part of the DProf programme. This was in two modes:

- i. Group supervision, facilitated by two members of academic staff, on a regular basis at periods of one to two months, for the first 3 years of the programme. This enabled all six people who had embarked on the programme together to gain peer and academic support. I found this opportunity to be invaluable.
- ii. Individual supervision – with two academic staff. This process has been equally important, offering a good balance between support and challenge, which I see as crucial elements of any worthwhile supervision arrangement.

As my research developed I realised that I was incorporating even more reflective activities into my professional life and therefore my inquiry. At the heart of all of these activities I used the regular process of writing morning pages in order to elicit insights regarding my developing practice as a facilitator (described elsewhere in this thesis). A further reflective tool was that, early in my inquiry, I devised a self-interview schedule to help me work out what distress meant to me at that time. I explore this in more detail later in my thesis.

All of these additional ways of reflecting can be seen as examples of my practice developing and out of these changes came improvements to my facilitation.

2) Activity

Beyond reflection I engaged in a range of professional development opportunities that related to the issue at the heart of my inquiry, i.e. presence in facilitation. In particular I attended:

- A one day conference on Spirituality in Health Care
- A five day residential course focusing on Holotropic Breathing
- A five day co-operative inquiry at John Heron's home in New Zealand
- A one day course entitled Speaking with Authenticity.

I will also say more regarding these activities later in the thesis.

The combination of new techniques of reflection and the further learning in which I was engaged provided the basis for developments in my practice that I begin to claim in the next section.

3) Application and Evaluation

There is much evidence of the changes to my practice within and between the lines throughout my autoethnographic thesis. This section clarifies that progress in a more tangible fashion. I have included examples of my facilitation from my early career, to offer a sense of history and context to my doctoral inquiry. I then go on to outline the various phases of my development, specifying instances when I noticed a change or where requested or unsolicited feedback raised my attention to my developing practice.

There were particular insights and events that occurred in the later stages of my DProf inquiry that seemed to epitomise my sense of change. For example I increasingly noticed and consciously used my ability to gather the thoughts of other people, and accurately represent them in writing. This ability enhances my standard approach of offering verbal feedback to clients. I cite one example of this change in my earlier section on the writing process,

referring to two therapists who engaged me to support them to write an article based on their innovative practice.

A further example of writing was the use of a novel, creative and slightly risky approach to recording a particularly tricky session with a group of experienced nurses working in a custodial setting. I sensed a risk in that I was confronting this group on the unspoken, possibly even unconscious agendas. The context of the group was supervision and the purpose of supervision is, in my view, to support changes in practice. My aim in such writing is therefore to inform and enable such development and I have abridged the report slightly to protect confidentiality.

Working with the Iceberg

Think of an iceberg then split the picture into three parts to represent the three hours we spent together.

In the first hour we looked at what was above the surface: the joy and struggle of the recent presentation you had created and delivered to quite a senior and potentially critical group. We paid attention to the great feedback and the way the team had pulled together to create and present a polished, professional performance. There was a sense of pride and satisfaction that was well justified.

The second hour (just below the surface of the water in the iceberg model) was when we began to explore struggles in relation to particular colleagues. The group shared and discussed clear examples and related how, individually and collectively, we learn coping mechanisms. There was recognition that, at times, we respond to other people's apparent defensiveness by becoming defensive ourselves.

The third hour (now we are deep in the ocean where the danger of the iceberg lurks barely seen) and the session became murky – there were vague hints of deeper difficulties that occasionally and suddenly became brighter then vanished again in the dark. There is a big block of ice down there and treading carefully is probably a great idea.

My sense of the iceberg, especially at the lower levels, is that we ignore it at our peril. A colleague uses a model of human communication that is a bit like this in that it has three ever-deepening levels. The top level is open and obvious, the next level is noticeable by body language and the lower level is about our core sense of security that can be very hidden. I will try to find the paper on this and send it or bring it next time.

I look forward to seeing you again next time and suggest that you bring along some thoughts about how to use the session to ensure your professional needs are met. What would be the most useful thing(s) for the team to reflect on? The point of the sessions is to support you in your practice so hopefully we can work together to achieve this.

Journal – 02/11/07

Feedback from the group concerned was very positive, in that those present felt understood. This prompted them to consider the issues that had been raised during the meeting.

I had other points of surprise learning or eureka moments as a result of spontaneous feedback on my work. These comments hinted at a wider sense of developments occurring in my practice and were the seeds that grew to become signposts to my future. The unsolicited feedback included:

- i) An individual client who was feeling vulnerable at the start of our session paused toward the end of the session to say:
"I don't know what you are doing or not doing but I feel safe, held, not judged."
- ii) After working with a large group on a two day programme the lead person gathered feedback from the group and summarised it as an impression that:
"Always seemed to be in control but never in charge."

Both comments were made within a few months of each other and the connection I made, between the two, was that both seemed to be commenting on my ability to be present. Neither could really say what it was I was doing but both suggested an appreciation of my focused and undivided attention on their needs. Having offered these hints regarding my development I now go back a little further, by providing a brief summary of my progress as a facilitator, in the form of an outline of my early career. I also give specific details of changes that occurred during the course of the DProf.

In the Early Days (long ago when I began to facilitate)

As I was about to facilitate my first group session the training manager suggested that the group would be marginally more nervous than I was likely to be. I have often found it helpful to remember this when meeting a new group, as too much focus on facilitator distress could lead to insensitivity to the possibility of facilitated distress, i.e. the distress that many people seem to experience when they are part of a group. I use many techniques to try to ease this difficulty for people. My standard ground rules for group work include the reminder that 'misery is optional'. This is intended to reassure participants of their right to choose the level of their participation, and to take responsibility for their own needs. Such ground rules seem particularly pertinent with regard to speaking out - I do try to minimise any insistence that people speak before they are ready, and have found that, paradoxically, this seems to help people to have their say.

Engaging in this autoethnographic inquiry has encouraged me to articulate such guiding principles. These have gradually become part of my way of working as my years of experience have accumulated.

As my Practice Developed (over the years since I began)

My early development as a facilitator included extremes of experience. On the one hand I became aware of my increasing tolerance of uncertainty in that working with groups rarely goes smoothly. On the other hand there were times when I was acutely sensitive to difficulties and found it hard to separate my own responsibilities from those of group members. Occasionally I tried to address or facilitate an apparent reaction to something I had said or done within the group. The reaction may have been quite minimal such as raised eyebrows and I intuitively sensed some relevance to the matter in hand. As I questioned such a reaction I recall being met with blank looks, as if the moment had not occurred and that I had imagined it. At times I was accused of being over-sensitive and I do recall a colleague once saying that intuition and paranoia are closely related!

I have learned to simply pay attention to such behaviour and use it as data to inform me about the individuals in particular and the group in general:

I noticed a sudden change in body language at the naming of a senior manager who was not present, this was accompanied by the expression of burning anger in the ensuing discussion. I held firm in the face of it – ready to respond to whatever came out next. At this point one participant asked me what I was going to do about this, as I was supposed to be the facilitator. I told him that hearing this and not blocking the strong feelings was my way of facilitating at that point. I felt completely there, self-aware without being self-conscious. There was a senior team member in the group who had previously stated his intention to leave at around this time. I asked him to stay and support movement through this difficult and emotionally charged issue. He did, and this seemed to help.

Journal – 17/01/05

At the start of the DProf

My move to new professional contexts increased my sense of distress and I relate several examples of the debilitating effect within this document. In many ways these experiences were instructive in my decision to focus on distress, distress free authority and then presence. The sense of distress I felt around this time is not an experience I want to repeat and I resolved to find ways in which I could learn how to prevent it happening again, or at least to reduce the degree of negative impact. I even considered giving up facilitating as a profession if this search proved to be fruitless.

As the DProf Progressed

As time went by I began to speak more about facilitator distress and co-facilitated a workshop on the topic. This workshop targeted experienced facilitators and provided a space for them to consider the matter in relation to their own practice. This may have been the time of my first real awareness of my attempts to develop my own practice whilst simultaneously facilitating practice development for others and illustrates my autoethnographic approach to practice development in its most raw state.

Feedback after the workshop was excellent but left me more bewildered. I found it difficult to separate out the phenomenon of distress free authority from my own experience of facilitator distress. My distress around facilitation even occurred in the act of facilitating this workshop. My co-facilitator was Jeremy Keeley and although we had been friends for some time this was the first time we had worked together. The challenges of co-facilitation are not explored in detail in my thesis as they may require a separate inquiry. I have however included further examples in the pages that follow to show progress in my own practice in this mode of facilitating.

Our styles blended well and in the post workshop post-mortem he commented that he saw me as an artist. I recall the way this touched me deeply. He pointed in particular to what he saw as artistry in the way that I managed my own distress and used it creatively to inform the group process. On reflection I can see that there are times when I can stand both within and apart from my own feelings and from this place engage more deeply with a group.

As these occasions have increased in frequency I have noticed a parallel willingness for me to experiment with my work. For example as I track my progress during the years of the DProf I see how I have left my comfort zone of public services, begun to engage in co-facilitation and accepted several pieces of work with large groups (over 60). One large group provided an interesting learning experience when a colleague and I agreed to facilitate a management development session focused on supporting junior colleagues through the next organisational transition:

We prepared well for our brief but less than 24 hours before the event almost everyone who was to attend had been told that their jobs were at risk. We agreed to go ahead in this new context and made efforts to suitably adapt our programme. This decision was a mistake, as the group was hostile and in no mood to think through creative visions and supportive structures for their staff, when they were not sure how the unfolding crisis would affect their roles. The Chief Executive summarily ended our session and we concluded that it would have been better to postpone. I was surprised to note that whilst this was

certainly an awkward and embarrassing moment, for my co-facilitator, and myself I did not spend too long allowing my inner critic to punish me too much.

Journal – 3/03/06

On reflection, continuing with this work was an honest mistake that I would not make again. My decision was probably based on the fact that I have had countless experiences with smaller groups when the apparent contract changes almost as soon as I walk in the room, due to sudden and/or recent contextual difficulties. It seems to me that it is the lot of the facilitator to always have a clear plan that is highly likely to be radically adapted or even discarded at the last minute. Maybe I had imagined that what works with smaller groups is transferable to large groups, but my experience now suggests otherwise. One colleague provided an interesting insight: whereas being in small groups is analogous to a family setting being part of a larger group is analogous to the school playground. This analogy certainly chimed with my experience.

A further example of experiential learning regarding my own development as a facilitator was also a piece of co-facilitation. I was conscious of the contrast in styles between my co-facilitator and myself. When we discussed this contrast she carefully but firmly suggested that it was not helpful to focus on this difference, and challenged me to simply present the material I was contracted to deliver without even mentioning the difference. I recounted this session in my journal notes as follows:

I delivered a presentation of Six Category Intervention Analysis (6CIA) – Heron (1990) in the context of a Leadership Development Programme for the management team of a large hospice. My role was support facilitator. It was on this programme, early in 2008, that it dawned on me that there may be a distinct difference between process facilitation (that I usually engage in – e.g. reflective practice, problem exploration and solving) and programme facilitation – with its tighter boundaries, clear structure and particular and definite outcomes anticipated).

I have used 6CIA for almost 30 years, usually as a backdrop to my work though rarely explicitly. I therefore knew the model without knowing it well, certainly not well enough to teach it in any formal sense.

In this context I created, developed and delivered a process through which participants might learn what they needed to know about 6CIA. Feedback was excellent, "his way of presenting John Heron's 6 categories was brilliant – he made it accessible and useable in a way that I haven't experienced before". The point I am emphasising here is that as a result of my own willingness to stretch, be creative and use existing skills my practice developed and my client group reported positively on their experience. This seems to be at the heart of the stated DProf purpose, i.e. the development of scholarly professionals.

Journal – 11/01/08

I was particularly pleased to note my insight that process facilitation describes the way that I work, and that this is different from, rather than better or worse than, programme facilitation. By preparing my material well and using my own style of facilitation I felt that I had been able to help a group to grasp a fairly complex model and to see how this related to their work. In the event the contrast of styles was irrelevant.

There was a pattern developing which suggested that learning for my DProf was immediately being recycled into my work. This is a crucial point in relation to my methodology: my developing practice as a facilitator is inextricably bound up with the 'business' of practice development.

There are further relevant examples that can be drawn from the time that I was learning about narrative research. I recall asking a group to consider their needs as a group in terms of stories:

1. What story do you currently tell about yourself as a team?
2. What story would others currently tell about you as a team?
3. What story would you want to share between you and outsiders for the future?

This suggestion was almost a throw-away remark that could easily have got lost in my general introduction and scene setting for the day event but it was very quickly picked up by the group and became the motif for what turned out to be a very successful and productive day.

A second example relates to my recent agonising over how I should prepare for a new group. I decided to begin without any pre-prepared script or notes and noted that in making this decision I was moving from thinking of this as no preparation, towards a willingness to accept and use my 30 years of experience.

I have used a similar approach many times since then as a corollary to my gradual realisation that my experience is a useful well from which to constantly draw ideas. This helped me to come to terms with the fact that the DProf Four (noted earlier) needed to be in some way combined as a grand narrative that relates and is related to my experience as a facilitator.

My gradual increase in confidence may be grounded in my work with individuals, with whom I remain more willing to experiment. In my one-to-one work I trust my instinct and feel more at ease to apologise, or move swiftly to another approach, if my intervention seems inappropriate or unhelpful to the client. This arena may be the breeding ground for new ideas that I can adapt to the different context of group work at a later date.

To summarise then ... my autoethnographic Practice Development has been a consistent and constant companion throughout the period of my inquiry. It has not been the self-contained project that I originally envisaged. Autoethnographic Practice Development is a 'process of becoming', where any account of progress is forever partial and provisional.

The next section mirrors the way in which my thinking developed regarding Practice Development. My emergent Comprehensive Review bears little resemblance to the Systematic Review that I had originally planned, and enthusiastically set about to complete. I have taken account of material from as many different sources as possible given the time constraints, energy and imagination at my disposal. At all times I have tried to be alert to the purpose of the professional doctorate and the need to err on the side of relevance to practice.

COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

Preamble

This section is entitled Comprehensive Review, but it was previously intended to be a Systematic Review, as outlined in the DProf programme literature, where it is listed as a core requirement of the professional doctorate. As I was writing up my thesis I adopted alternative terminology to describe my review and used the term comprehensive review, as this is more appropriate to the autoethnographic approach on which my inquiry is based. I am grateful to Kate Galvin for the idea as she suggested this as a possible alternative during my academic supervision,.

To set the scene for my own approach I provide an overview of what others say about systematic reviews and include general definitions and rationale. I explore their application to qualitative research and provide a series of brief notes regarding alternatives to systematic review such as meta-analysis, meta-synthesis and meta-ethnography.

General Overview

When I began to think about systematic reviews I wanted to establish the difference between this concept and a standard literature review. I made an assumption that a systematic review must go far beyond the more limited effort of a literature review and initially had a modest intention of ensuring that I clearly showed this distinction in my own work. I particularly wanted to use the abundant literature to show that I have read well, and stood on the shoulders of giants whose work constantly provides supportive underpinning to my own work. This is different to showing that I am well read through a broad yet mechanical demonstration of what others say on the topics that relate to my inquiry.

Classic Definitions

The concept and practice of systematically reviewing research material has emerged over the years as the volume of findings has increased. There seems to be a groundswell of opinion supporting the use of such reviews and the term emphasises the clear distinction between systematic review and the literature review. The former is much broader in both scope and method than the latter. As often appears to be the case with academic concepts, there are a variety of definitions to be found. For example, Mulrow and Cook (1998) suggest a simple definition and then highlight scope and method:

“Systematic reviews are concise summaries of the best available evidence” ... They ... “ ... use explicit and rigorous methods to identify, critically appraise and synthesise relevant studies. As their name implies, systematic reviews - not satisfied with finding part of ‘the truth’ - look for the whole truth.”

Mulrow and Cook (1998: 1)

This definition has two key strands. Firstly by referring to the need to be concise and based on best available evidence it is implied that such reviews may be a useful vehicle to counter information overload, which in our technological age, has increased exponentially. This thesis is not the place to fully explore the use of the Internet but I note some caution regarding information that is so easily available yet often difficult to validate. Secondly there seems to be a sense of suspicion about the veracity of standard reviews:

“Literature reviews may themselves be biased, and by carefully selecting which studies to review, it is possible to produce two similar reviews that come to entirely opposite conclusions.”

Petticrew and Roberts (2005: 5)

This point suggests that systematic reviews are also open to bias. One famous example is found in Smyth (2002) who recounts the way in which Linus Pauling, a distinguished biochemist:

“... quoted more than 30 trials that supported his contention that vitamin C could prevent the common cold ... A critical review of what

Pauling had written showed that he had omitted a number of studies that did not support the contention that he so enthusiastically made ... "
Smyth (2002: 165)

I do however agree with the more ambitious contention that systematic reviewing should go beyond traditional sources of material and note the deeper purpose to which they aspire, as follows:

"Systematic reviews aim to provide an objective, comprehensive summary of the best evidence (whether it appears in the published literature or not, and most of it does not."

Petticrew and Roberts (2005: 23)

This may make systematic practice in this field more difficult and Jones (2004) expands this point, offering a rationale for the use of unpublished work that I regard as highly relevant in my pursuit of an appropriate autoethnographic mode of review. He says that:

"Grey literature and its inclusion in systematic review is the singularly most important contribution to the democratisation of the evidence based movement. Grey literature is non-conventional, fugitive, and sometimes ephemeral but, by its nature, often more inclusionary than standard peer-reviewed and commercially published work."

Jones (2004: 99)

The assertion that much relevant material is unpublished is of great interest to me as both qualitative researcher in general and autoethnographer in particular. I have used my own unpublished journal notes as a key source of data and will return to this point later. For now I regard the notion that a review should be repeatable by someone else, who will arrive at the same outcome, to be inappropriate within my own work.

Returning to the distinction between types of review, it seems to me that making a serious claim that a systematic review is more than a literature review involves addressing the question of how the one goes beyond the other. This may be particularly pertinent in the field of qualitative research where systematic review is of questionable relevance. Indeed, Jones (2004) comments on the use of methods borrowed from different traditions of research and makes a strong suggestion that one should not simply lift techniques from quantitative work:

“A mistake is made ... in transposing methods best suited to systematic reviews of quantitative studies into qualitative ones.”

Jones (2004: 95)

My search for support from the qualitative traditions was a helpful movement away from the limitations I discovered through my early learning on Systematic Reviews. I do however respect the considerable efforts that have gone into the setting up and administration of central points of information such as the Cochrane Collaboration, a centre established in the UK in the early 1990's to carry out systematic reviews of the effects of health care interventions. The Campbell Collaboration, a parallel centre that seems to have been prompted into existence by the Cochrane success has a central intention:

“ ... which aims to prepare, maintain and disseminate the results of systematic reviews of social, educational, and criminological interventions.”

Petticrew and Roberts (2005: 20)

These collaborative efforts are excellent vehicles to support reviews in the various fields of public service on which they focus. They indicate systematic methods with which to carry out and present findings along with easily accessible databases of completed reviews that are intended to inform evidence-based practice. I see great value in the use of such supportive sources, especially where the aim is to conduct a meta-analysis that is applicable in the context of quantitative research. The term meta-analysis may be confused with systematic review but it is actually intended for the following context:

“Like all quantitative studies, systematic reviews often include a statistical analysis. This involves combining the data from the included studies in a process referred to as ‘meta-analysis’.”

Smyth (2002: 174)

This approach was clearly not appropriate for the type of research in which I was engaged although I was interested to find a hint in this field that helped my own sense of direction. This surprising support is taken from a journal editorial, and refers to the art as well as the science of systematic reviews.

This piece challenges the trend that assumes that systematic approaches are good reviews and others as somehow sub-standard, saying that this:

“ ... has the potential to take the art and scholarship out of reviewing and reduce it to a formulaic exercise ... not all reviews need to be ‘systematic’ in the now accepted sense ... ”

Griffiths and Norman (2005: 373)

This commentary gave me much encouragement to look more widely and as I considered the alternatives I became more interested by the notion of meta-synthesis:

“Meta-synthesis ... is a building block of evidence based practice. It may be either quantitative (meta-analysis) or qualitative (meta-ethnography). Its value lies in the recognition that busy practitioners find it almost impossible to make decisions based on the massive and increasing volume of research evidence.”

Booth (2001)

A repeating theme in the literature is the claim, or at least the aspiration, to find more reliable evidence and the suggestion that meta-synthesis is more likely to lead to truth became an interesting and attractive idea to me:

“The appeal of meta-synthesis lies in our hunger for more true, more accurate, or more real explanations of phenomena and more coherent ways to make sense of them.”

Paterson et al (2001: 110)

Whilst the idea of summing up being a science helps me to think of myself as a researcher, I gradually concluded that meta-synthesis was also not applicable to my inquiry in that autoethnographies are, by definition, individual accounts. I did however note the possibility of combining the results of qualitative studies through the use of meta-ethnography that seeks to:

“... retain the uniqueness and holism of accounts even as we synthesize them in the translations.”

Noblitt and Hare (1988: 7)

Furthermore Jones (2004) states that:

"Meta-ethnography is driven by interpretation not analysis ... using such tools as key metaphors, analogy, reflexivity and ritual."

Jones (2004: 100)

This suggests a radically different way of bringing together learning from many studies. The language used by other authors ebbs and flows between scientific terminology and narrative alternatives and I was interested in the idea of '*realist review*' possibly based on my human desire to be considered a realist. The authors who coined this term assert that:

"Traditional methods of review that focus on measuring and reporting on programme effectiveness, often find that the evidence is mixed or conflicting, and provide little or no clue as to why the intervention worked or did not work ... the emerging 'realist' approach to evaluation ... provides an explanatory analysis aimed at discerning what works for whom, in what circumstances, in what respects and how."

Pawson et al (2005: 21)

These authors recommend that we should take individual accounts and local contexts more seriously and this supported my dawning belief that a narrative review was the most logical way forward in relation to my own work, especially as my chosen methodology is still in relative infancy:

"Narrative reviews may be most useful for obtaining a broad perspective on a topic ... for describing the history or development of a problem and its management ... describe cutting edge developments if research is scant or preliminary."

Cook, Mulrow & Haynes (1997: 378)

Overall I suggest that the difference between systematic reviews and narrative reviews may be that the former are associated with specific clinical questions whilst the latter relate to wider issues and are therefore particularly useful in providing the background or context within which systematic reviews will be carried out at a later date.

How Systematic Reviews can be conducted

When I was still intending to carry out a systematic review I was hoping to find a straightforward schema to follow; possibly a protocol that would clearly identify the parameters for my search, help me to recognise relevant material

and (equally importantly) what material to exclude. I discovered that I might consider the range of primary research studies to assess their quality in terms of methodology and methods, as well as assessing the findings. I would then consider the ways in which they are consistent and ways in which they vary:

“When reviewers have a very large sample of studies from which to select they can simplify this task by reviewing all of the titles, then the abstracts, and then the full articles, excluding studies that do not meet one or more selection criteria at each step. In doing so, reviewers should record (on the selection forms) the reasons for exclusion.”

Meade and Richardson (1997: 534)

On a technical level such a process made sense to me and seemed a logical way forward especially as these authors refine their advice on how to consider studies selected, saying that reviewers need three key objectives:

“1) To understand the validity of the studies, 2) to uncover reasons for differences among study results other than chance, and 3) to provide readers with sufficient information with which to judge for themselves the applicability of the systematic review to their clinical practice.”

Meade and Richardson (1997: 534)

These points are elaborated by others such as Smyth (2002) and Petticrew and Roberts (2005) who suggest several steps that one may take in carrying out a Systematic Review. Steps might include particular attention to the focus or question; outlining eligibility criteria for inclusion of studies. The task requires full engagement with the studies selected and other material of possible relevance, along with a critical appraisal of the included studies from which the reviewer must extract the data, analyse the results and report on the review. The resulting combination of work reviewed is then gathered into a synthesis and interpreted to create an exemplar of best possible evidence on which practice can be based and improved.

Purpose of the Systematic Review

Having established how a systematic review may be carried out I turned my attention to the question of why one would engage in such a task. Mulrow and Cook (1998) are very clear on the issue of usefulness of systematic

reviews and prompted me to give more thought to purpose. They suggest that:

'Systematic literature reviews, including meta-analyses, are invaluable scientific activities'.

Mulrow and Cook (1998: ix)

I wondered in what way they may be invaluable and considered overload of information and the possibly logical argument that it is important to learn from history. On the other hand history can also confine, as expressed in the well-used adage that *'if you always do what you have always done then you will always get what you always got'*. It may be true to say that attending to the present with full, undivided attention, unfettered by the past, can be equally appropriate:

"You cannot escape from experiences, but they need not take root in the soil of the mind. These roots give rise to problems, conflicts and constant struggle. There is no way out of this but to die to every yesterday."

Krishnamurti (1991: 7)

As my knowledge about Systematic Reviews increased that my doubts as to the relevance for my inquiry surfaced. My autoethnography certainly seeks to learn from past thinkers but it also stands very definitely within my own unfolding and lived experience and I realised that my process of review must therefore be influenced by my methodology.

Back to the Future - A Systematic Review at the Start

At the transfer stage of the doctorate I anticipated that my eventual systematic review would have three key components:

- 1) A record of developments based on my original study plan, as they happened, informed by contemporaneous research journal notes that justify the direction I had taken.
- 2) A definition of systematic review, applied to my own inquiry, supported by an explanation of how this may differ from a conventional literature

review. This was likely to include an exploration of the difference between quantitative and qualitative approaches to review.

- 3) A description of the process and outcome of my review that would:
- Explore specific terms - facilitation, distress-free authority and facilitator presence.
 - Explore the current practice of facilitation. What is the field? Where am I in the field?
 - Focus on the concept and practice of presence
 - Filter out key points regarding excellence in facilitation
 - Articulate a kaleidoscope model to help professional peers to orientate their own practice and find possible routes to developing their presence.

As I progressed in the writing phase I noted that my confidence in the coherence and clarity of the plan was competing with a deeper misgiving:

"A Yiddish proverb comes to mind, 'Men tracht un Got lacht' ... 'men plan and god laughs' ... God ... does not laugh at humans for no reason, nor does he or she laugh over our troubles or misfortunes. He or she does have a laugh, though, at our attempts to tame time and to control it. Science, as a primarily modern and masculine endeavour of prediction, is embodyingly funny for him or her."

Noy (2003: 6)

It was from this origin of uncertainty that the comprehensive review emerged and I can identify a particular point in time when this began to become clear. This turning point is elaborated in the following section.

The Turning Point

I noted that the difficulty I was experiencing in creating a discrete section called Systematic Review mirrored and matched the similar issues I had confronted in trying to separate out one piece of practice development. I once again met the issue of whether this was a requirement of the DProf. I was perplexed regarding an appropriate method to systematically review within the context of autoethnography. I could not see how it was possible, let alone

relevant, and felt that whatever I may produce could only be partial or sub-standard and that this would merely reveal a gap between the apparent requirements of the programme and the demands inherent in my methodology.

I knew that I had followed a rigorous and continuous approach to review throughout my inquiry in that each time I became aware of an idea that was new to me I subjected it to ongoing review. I have sought at all times to be sufficiently systematic, in the sense of gathering and considering appropriate literature and other material, ensuring that I go beyond traditional sources in general and written sources in particular. I have paid attention to my own thoughts and consulted with peers and, above all, taken many opportunities to engage in learning. This has included travelling to New Zealand to engage in a Co-operative Inquiry in a group that included the man whose work has been a strong influence on my approach to working with people and who also created this democratic style of research, (Heron 1996).

The period during which I was grappling with the systematic review provided a particular turning point within my whole inquiry. I recall the beginning of the DProf and the ambitious outpouring of my energy on my new challenge. I set my sights high but my hopes were soon dashed:

"I determined to learn the difference between knowledge and foolishness, wisdom and madness. But I found out that I might as well be chasing the wind."

Ecclesiastes

This quote, found during a sleepless night, did little to soothe my busy mind but did provide longer-term reassurance that I must be realistic in my search for knowledge. The field of human existence is infinite, my time and energy finite! I recall one person cautioning me that lofty ambitions can be unrealistic and remarking that I was "either Einstein or arrogant" in response to my expression of the hope that my doctorate would add something original to the body of knowledge. Despite this rather discouraging remark I remain committed to aiming high and my life work is about encouraging others to be the best that they can be. My personal role as father of four adult children

and my professional role as facilitator of countless individuals and groups are grounded in the belief that we all have something in particular to offer. Nelson Mandela used the following quote during his inaugural speech, when accepting the Presidency of South Africa (produced in full later in this document, as an inspirational piece in my kaleidoscope section):

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be?”

Williamson (1992: 190)

Whatever the merits of my ambitions the notion of systematic review increasingly failed to resonate as it dawned on me that the key challenge may be to produce something that is demonstrably comprehensive rather than necessarily recognisable when set against the work of others. Finding a balance between a coherent, systemic and reproducible approach and the need to be methodologically consistent was my priority.

In this respect my review has been open ended and supported by my constant willingness to be influenced by new material even through the writing up process. My thesis as a whole is a summary of my remembered and attended to experience to date, drawing on a diverse range of material encountered along the way and systematically synthesised to form a doctoral submission. I did not want to produce a cautious review, as I wanted to show how this process and my whole inquiry are inseparable. The ever-present strand of comprehensive reviewing is in my view highly consistent with autoethnography.

I have become increasingly alert to how my own practice typically includes a degree of review of the work of others and have had feedback on how quickly I turn my own learning into teaching, my tendency is always to share what I know. Chaim Noy is an autoethnographer who seems to understand the key issues:

“Mainstream academic writing makes it tough for dialogically or relationally oriented thinkers ... not only do I share ideas with colleagues, or borrow them, ‘steal’ them etc., but when reading others’ works, I strongly feel that the conversation created between us is the primary mode of knowledge creation ... And so the ‘literature review’ sections in my publications are usually in the form of a dialogue (open ended), rather than a monologue (conclusive).”

Noy (2003: 10)

I have paid particular attention to sources most likely to link to my study, following connections to books and journals cited. I regularly re-visited standard library catalogues and engaged in Internet searches. I came to believe that serendipity has a legitimate place in my inquiry, as there were many occasions when chance seemed to guide my next steps. Indeed it is often said that when the student is ready the teacher appears. I have noticed how I often seem to pick the right book off the shelf and find something that is immediately relevant, or stumble upon a website with a nugget of material that I can use or develop. It may be that it is at such times that we put ourselves in a position to simply notice what is there, as opposed to looking for what we expect to find.

What I found most surprising were those times when I had an original thought, and noted it in my journal, only to find a previous journal note of the same original thought that I had made some months previously. It was as if my unconscious was not willing to allow me to forget things that I felt to be of importance. Conversely I feel sure that it is possible to systematically review in a way that screens out those things we would prefer not to see.

During academic supervision I recounted the way that I had found some likely sources of material and asked for guidance on how to use these works in a way that would be logical and consistent with my inquiry. One of my peers had just mentioned the notion of “*berry picking*” and my supervisors directed me to Bates (1989) who uses this term to describe the very process I seemed to be discovering for myself. I noticed that I felt defensive and concluded that that this was because a retrospective claim to have used berry picking seemed inappropriate. My discovery of this supportive literature was not

contemporaneous and I did not therefore take it deliberately. I did however find reassurance in noting that others recognise this as a bona fide approach.

The concept of berry picking is potentially very useful, and Marcia Bates' work includes a series of suggestions to manage the explosion in online sources of data that has changed the strategies that researchers use to retrieve data. She describes six ways to engage with such data that I summarise here in précis form:

1. *Footnote chasing* or "backward chaining" - involves following up footnotes ... moving backward in leaps through reference lists.
2. *Citation searching* or "forward chaining" - where one begins with a citation and finds out who cites it ... thus making leaps forward.
3. *Journal run* - searching through relevant volume years of a key journal.
4. *Area scanning* - browsing materials that are physically co-located with other materials located earlier.
5. *Subject searches in bibliographies and abstracting and indexing (A & I) services*. Many bibliographies and most A & I services are arranged by subject and therefore available to search.
6. *Author searching* - when a searcher uses an author name to see if the author has done any other work on the same topic.

I find it interesting that my own approach to searching included many of these elements and am further reassured by the way that this author goes on to suggest that:

"Real searches ... use all the above techniques and more, in endless variation. It is part of the nature of berrypicking that people adapt the strategy to the particular need at the moment; as the need shifts in part or whole, the strategy often shifts as well - at least for effective searchers."

Bates (1989: 419)

I have certainly experienced the reality of my comprehensive review and trust that the shifts I have made have helped me to make me a more effective searcher.

Systematic Reviews – a Postscript

In conclusion, systematic reviews may not be all that they claim to be. I have read other systematic reviews and noted my waxing and waning interest. I can see that researchers have put an immense amount of effort into their work but I increasingly lose interest. There will usually be other relevant work that they do not include, such as conversational knowledge, grey literature, foreign language material and ancient wisdom that could also be used. I continue to wonder how appropriate academic value might be placed on the inclusion of chance findings.

I also realise that publication is behind practice and that by the time written work is published either in journals or in books, it is telling the story of what is past.

Taking an autoethnographic approach to review has meant that guidelines have not been apparent and the consequent struggle (laced with a significant sense of freedom) to carry out an appropriate review is encapsulated in my journal:

“In refusing to accept my own authority – by attempting to articulate in my own words and in my behaviour, a way of enshrining uncertainty and therefore openness to questioning – I must also abandon hope of finding authority elsewhere. Stop looking for the answer, the font of knowledge. Engage in life seeking authenticity moment to moment in which I bring as much of myself as possible to any interaction – within myself and with others.”

Journal - 12/12/06

Eventually I fully resolved to find a way of reviewing that would fit more coherently with my methodology. I accepted that whilst a search strategy needs to be robust it may not be reproducible. I could have conducted an extensive review regarding one of the concepts I have studied, such as facilitation or facilitator presence. It would have been equally possible to show how my search could be replicated, but in the case of my own inquiry neither of the above strategies seemed particularly relevant to

autoethnography. The standstill elicited by my internal wrangling was eventually broken by the appearance of the term 'comprehensive review'.

Emergence of a Comprehensive Autoethnographic Review

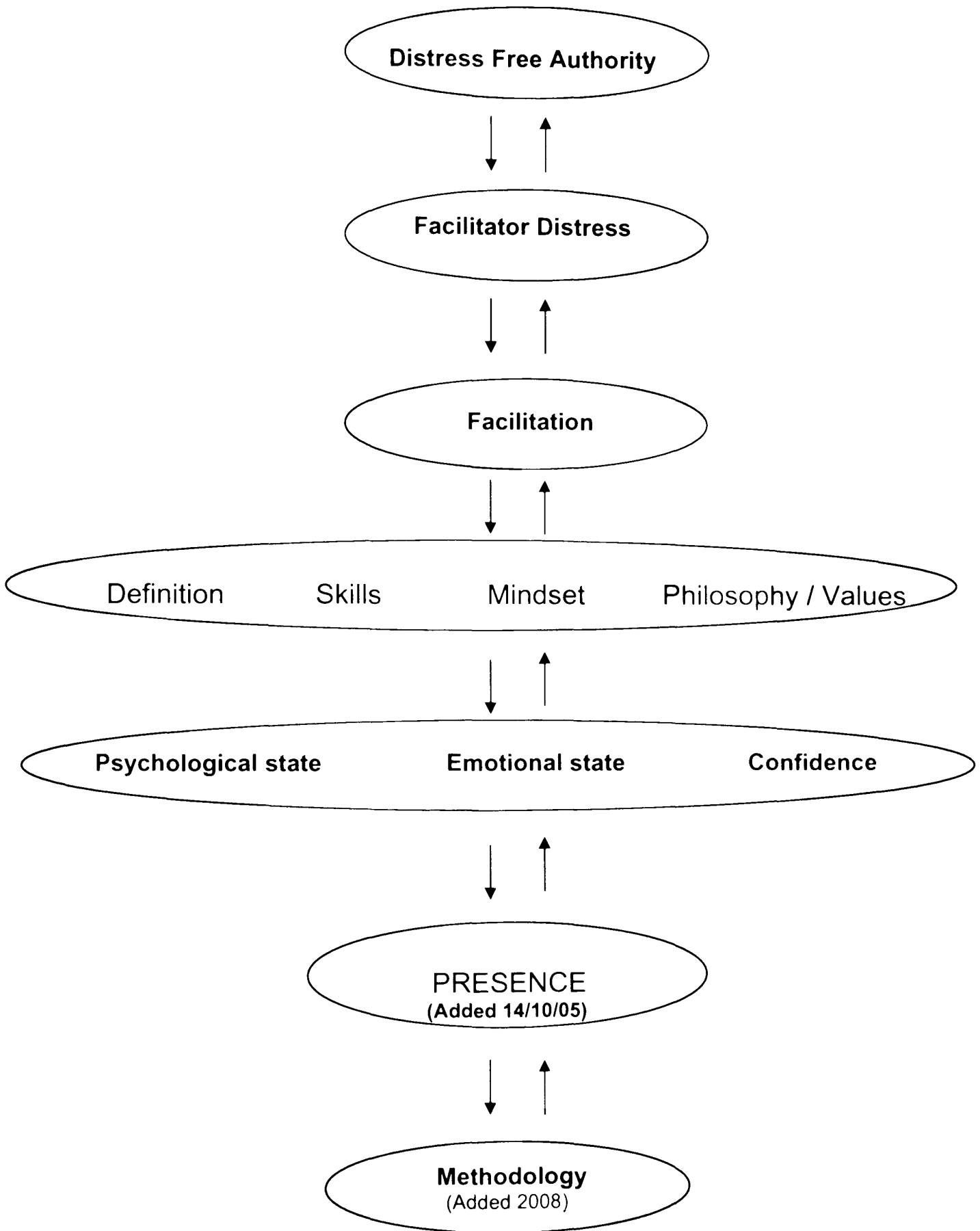
Having realised the need for compatibility with my autoethnographic stance, the issue of deciding what my review should ultimately focus upon became less important although I felt that I still needed to fully explore the key topic of my inquiry (facilitator presence) **and** my central methodology (autoethnography). I used the three key points listed below to provide a boundary to my thoughts, along with a further possibility that provides a loose container for the other three:

1. Presence, ...or ...
2. Autoethnography, ...or...
3. How autoethnography can be judged.

The fourth possibility would be to use all of the above in a creative blend.

If I could comprehensively focus on my presence to my own inquiry as it happened, in the spirit of a lived methodology, whilst also attending to the task of extracting learning from my experience, then this would be a fruitful way forward. If I could also find ways for the ideas and experience of others to blend with my own, through conversations, reading and observation (of self and others) then I felt confident that my review would be commensurate with the level of award I am seeking.

Before I fully realised that the concept of presence was at the horizon of my inquiry, a diagram emerged in my journal (7 July 2005) that seemed to represent the parameters of my review. I added presence later and followed this with the further addition of my methodological position. The latter amendment occurred at the writing up stage when autoethnography and, crucially, the way that this may be judged were most pertinent to my work.



This diagram represents the scope of my comprehensive review. It shows the logical progression of my review pathway, culminating in presence, and has been the general framework for review from which I have grounded my autoethnographic approach. It is presented as a downward path in a chronological sense and an upward path in terms of hierarchical relevance to my study, and so the baseline of my methodology appears at the foot of the model, as it is also on this ground that all of my inquiry stands.

I found it useful to explore the key terms I use throughout this thesis and see each section as integral to my comprehensive review. As each issue appeared I set about gathering related material and incorporated any learning into my thesis.

My review process has been a pathway rather than a strategy and this concept is analogous with my approach to life and work. I usually start with a general interest or sense of direction rather than a specific plan. If I am out walking I may know roughly where I want to be or I may explore within a set time or distance limit and allow myself to be surprised by the actual journey or destination. It is often true for me that I make a journey first and look later for a map, to see where I have been, discover what I may have missed and consider whether I would go the same way next time. I do not always take a map as I set off, even though it may be useful to inform the journey:

"I love to walk in open country without a map. This way I name my own mountains, and allow my adventures their privilege of surprise."

Macartney (2007: 14)

In relation to presence, given that this is not a fixed point that one achieves, a more open pathway seems particularly appropriate. Paradoxically I have also turned inward through a continuous reflective cycle that has helped me to expose several layers of experience and consequent insights.

I now appreciate that a comprehensive autoethnographic review must rigorously pay attention to and follow up idiosyncratic leads that emerge from the twists and turns of an inquiry. I believe that this requires the same

scholarly curiosity that a pre-planned review entails. My review has attended to a whole raft of sources of autobiographical material and encounters with others that are synthesised to make up this complete work. These sources include:

- Educational opportunities
- Regular journal writing
- Feedback from peers, clients and supervisors
- Relevant literature on facilitation, including attention to unpublished material
- Memory of prior experience
- Conversations
- Supervision (academic and professional)

Summary of Comprehensive Review Section

My review has been a prolonged effort during which I have deliberated in an sustained and organic fashion, in the context of my commitment to life long learning. My search has been internal, through my thoughts as expressed in journal pages, and external, through the words of others. I have considered the written and spoken word; included planned events and chance conversations along with snippets that seemed to be both unrelated and intimately connected.

I have shown how my thinking changed from an original intention as a result of immersion in my own experience. At the outset my review was traditional, i.e. based on search engines and databases, and prioritised library time. I considered and rejected a mechanistic approach that would demonstrate a focused one-off grand literature search that in my view would have proved nothing more than an ability to carry out such a search. Library time has however been an adjunct to my review at all times and in this way any temptation to create a routine piece of work has been replaced by a constant openness to new literature.

As a result of my commitment to this process I am now more acutely aware of, and grateful for, the work of predecessors. I understand that, to some degree at least, I work in the slipstream of others.

"If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."

Isaac Newton

On the Shoulders of Giants

Clearly I am not the only facilitator to be, or have been, in the world. I realise that I can stand on the shoulders of giants in that some of these peers must have had, and written about, similar experiences to my own. Unfortunately the giants did not immediately show themselves to me.

My early visits to the literature using standard search techniques focused on both distress free authority and facilitator distress. I may have coined the latter term, almost unconsciously, and it related to my personal observation of others and myself in facilitator role, acting in ways that did not appear to be distress free. As stated previously it was some time before I became conscious of the way that I had turned John Heron's concept of distress free authority on its head. This change, and the subsequent move to presence, are the backbone of my thesis and this spine should now be recognisable in my writing.

Whilst these changes were happening within my mind I continued to enthusiastically search for literature on facilitation, and in particular for work regarding distress free authority. I had little success in this respect even though there were many references to facilitation that helped me to retain my enthusiasm. I began to wonder whether I might be looking for the wrong thing, in the wrong place. There is an old fable, sometimes said to be about the Sufi wise fool Mulla Nasrudin, a character who appears several times in my thesis. He recounts the time when he was observed, drunkenly looking for his keys under the street lamp. He is joined by a passer-by who eventually asks if the Mulla is certain that he lost the keys in the street. Nasrudin responds by saying that he had in fact lost them by the house and explains to

the perplexed passer-by that the light is better under the lamp than by the house.

It seemed to me that although the library was where the light was strongest there was little sign of what I was looking for; maybe I was also looking in the wrong place. Nonetheless my exploratory visits took in several university libraries and I was helped in this respect by the reciprocal borrowing rights between institutions that enabled me to use resources nearer to my home. I also used the RCN library in London and, with caution, the vast array of material available at my fingertips, via the Internet. There may be sceptics on the use of general Internet searches but I have lost count of the times when I have been able to follow up leads on hunches. I am deeply grateful to be living in a time when so much information is available from the convenience of my own home.

The vehicle of the DProf has encouraged me to re-visit concepts that I thought I knew well. I found that I had to reassess preconceptions about the level of my own knowledge. As I explored I found so much material that I had little or no awareness about. Even within my study of the term facilitation I discovered material I had never previously considered and this gave me renewed respect for authors who have taken the time to write and share their thoughts. I trust that the following pages do some justice to their efforts.

One final point is to say that my concern about the whole work has been consistent and I note a journal entry from around the mid-point of the Dprof:

My reference list is nothing more than an illusion, an attempt to persuade the academic community of my scholarly activity, to demonstrate that I have read widely. The truth is that I have. However, no list of sources can ever do justice or pay homage to the range of influences on my work ... I cannot begin to forge a real link between what I write and the myriad of influences.

Journal 04/07/06

Despite this self-scepticism the following sections provide an overview of several key theoretical concepts. I attempted a series of further, more

specific, searches in psychological, educational and health databases but could find no direct reference to the specific terms I had in mind.

I did find enough material on facilitation to keep me academically busy for years but much of this material related to specific instances of facilitation in the form of practice examples. Finding books, articles and other literature that gave any insight into the core concept of facilitation was not straightforward and I began to seek some parameters for my work. I used a semi-disciplined approach that enabled me to narrow my focus of interest towards the particular notion of distress free authority and facilitator distress. The following passages are the tangible result of my searches relating to the technical terms in my inquiry.

About Facilitation

As I began to search for leads on facilitation, I noted that this was my topic, the area of my practice in which I am so often immersed. A colleague recently commented that she thought my middle name was 'facilitator' and whilst I appreciate the positive feedback implied in her comment I have learned to be more mindful of the limits to my knowledge and understanding.

My early journal entries refer to my explosion of interest in the wealth of leads provided by a single search relating to facilitation; this was the first hint that there would be much to learn.

- *Just 4 weeks on...*
- *Surge of interest in approaching the literature*
- *The wealth of 'leads' I got from a single hit...finding 50 of the first 100, which looked quite useful.*
- *Good discipline to:*
 - i) Scan abstracts*
 - ii) Note particular sources that look promising*
 - iii) Pick out key points*

Journal – 27/05/04

I decided to explore the essence of facilitation in order to describe some of the key principles. I frequently utilise references that others may wish to explore further and have sought to avoid any temptation to simply re-write perfectly good texts that already exist.

Definitions

I firstly examine ways in which the role and person of a facilitator may be defined. One dictionary suggests that facilitation means:

“ ... to make easy or less difficult or more easily achieved.”

The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus (1997)

It is from this baseline that I explore facilitation, and I turned to my 'academic mentor' John Heron who elaborates on the meaning of the term facilitator saying:

“What I mean by facilitator ... is a person who has the role of empowering participants to learn ... the facilitator will normally be formally appointed to this role by whatever organisation is sponsoring the group. And the group members will voluntarily accept the facilitator in this role.”

Heron (1999: 1)

I considered the sort of person suitable for this role, someone who would be accepted by group members. I found that the work of Christine Hogan offers much insight. She suggests that an individual drawn to such a role would be:

“A self reflective process-person who has a variety of human, process, technical skills and knowledge, together with a variety of experiences to assist groups of people to journey together to reach their goals. I see facilitation as an art, science, craft and profession.”

Hogan (2002: 57)

A key question that arises for me from these definitions is - what might a facilitator do in order to make learning easier for other people? In seeking to address this question in the literature I discovered that when one sets out to answer an apparently simple question one is immediately confronted by confusion. I noted the work of my colleague Fiona Pearson who has created a handout for would-be facilitators for whom she was providing a development

course. She quotes the Thiagi Group and their work 'Secrets of Successful Facilitators':

"We spent the past 10 years in some futile research. We interviewed and observed facilitators and groups they facilitated in an attempt to find the secrets of effective facilitation. ... Initial data from our observations and interviews were disappointing and confusing. We did not find consistent, common behaviours among these effective facilitators. Further, even the same facilitator seemed to use different behaviours within the same activity at different times. As we collected and classified more data and reflected on these patterns, we realised the real secret of effective facilitators was buried within the apparent inconsistency."

The Thiagi Group (1999)

I was thankful that this group seems to make a leap from this position of apparent impossibility to a coherent and optimistic stance that may be more open to practical application:

"Their conclusion on re-examining the data was that effective facilitators are ... flexible ... adaptive ... proactive ... responsive ... resilient."

According to F. Pearson (personal communication, February 2006)

I wanted to build on this list of attributes that an effective facilitator may have and to discover how I may facilitate with distress free authority in the way that was fully present. I reviewed the ideas expressed by my own community of peers, facilitators both far and near.

At a global level the International Association of Facilitators (IAF) has membership in 70 countries. The IAF has a mission to:

" ... promote, support and advance the art and practice of professional facilitation through methods exchange, professional growth, practical research, collegial networking and support services. This is accomplished through peer-to-peer networking, professional development and annual conferences"

IAF (2004)

I was particularly interested in their Statement of Values and Code of Ethics (2004) that seemed to get to the heart of facilitation:

“As group facilitators, we believe in the inherent value of the individual and the collective wisdom of the group. We strive to help the group make the best use of the contributions of each of its members. We set aside our personal opinions and support the group's right to make its own choices.”

IAF (2002)

Remembering the collective wisdom of a group may help facilitators to remain present in that it is not necessary for the facilitator to always know most or best. I am struck by the Code of Ethics developed by the IAF and offer a summary of this document in the Kaleidoscope section of my thesis.

Standards for Facilitators

I regard facilitation as a professional activity although it may not yet be contained within specific training, competencies and membership. Given this lack of formality I wondered how one might therefore assess the competence of a facilitator. Heron proposes a series of criteria for excellence that prompted my original inquiry and provides a useful template by which facilitators may self-assess. He suggests that assessment can be related to six dimensions of facilitation as follows:

- Planning
- Understanding
- Confronting
- Feeling
- Structuring
- Valuing

The ability to plan sessions with and/or for the group, understand the group process, confront the group on salient issues, work with feelings, structure sessions and value participants in a variety of ways are all indicators of competence. Facilitators could also consider all six of these dimensions in relation to three modes of decision-making, i.e. hierarchical, co-operative and autonomous. I have heard John Heron talking about these modes of decision-making at a conference and was struck by his comment on the

paradox of pre-emptively seeking to work co-operatively with a group. He made the point that if one has made that choice independently from the group then that decision is in fact hierarchical.

My first encounters with John Heron were second hand, through his writing and through the interpretation of his work by facilitators and tutors during my professional education and development.

Later I witnessed him delivering a keynote speech at the University of Surrey where he had been a key creator the Human Potential Research Group (HPRG) a centre of experiential learning. The idea of learning through all the senses was an innovative and unusual undertaking in the corridors of academia.

He described this development and it sounded to me as if he had brought a peaceful Trojan Horse into the traditional system. This initiative seemed to be radical and challenging and yet, simultaneously, not adversarial. This was deeply impressive to me.

He talked of the importance of the presence of a teacher in the learning environment and the consequential impact on the student of this presence and seemed to model what he was talking about in a smooth and elegant way. His stance was powerful yet not authoritarian.

Journal – 29/9/08

These journal notes were written without reference to material other than that contained in my own memory. This man and his work made a deep and long lasting impression on me and this is honoured and captured throughout my doctoral thesis.

Heron's latest iteration regarding facilitation is 'The Complete Facilitators' Handbook' (1999). The front cover shows a schema where the word presence features as the central quality through which a complete facilitator could be recognised. Heron is careful to say in his introductory pages:

"Please note this new title does not refer to the complete handbook of the facilitator. It refers to the handbook of the complete, that is accomplished, facilitator."

Heron (1999: xii)

Other authors focus specifically on the facilitation of learning, for example Bee and Bee (1998) start with this emphasis and consider the core skills of a

facilitator to be rapport, listening, questioning and managing. They highlight how a facilitator may behave at various stages of the facilitation and emphasise the non-directive nature of facilitation.

One ready-made structure by which facilitators may measure their own work exists in the nursing literature. The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) has produced a Facilitator Accreditation Scheme (2005) that separates the craft of facilitation into seven standards, all of which have elements of competence. This is a comprehensive model that takes into account the required skills and knowledge in relation to:

1. Holistic practice - based on different ways of knowing (e.g. practical or theoretical)
2. Knowing the group/individuals - relationship building skills
3. Moral integrity - honesty, openness, non-judgmental
4. Knowing what matters - able to recognise and deal with priorities
5. Effectiveness - with a wide repertoire of skills
6. Practical understanding of group dynamics - balancing the task, the group and the individuals
7. Ability to identify and demonstrate outcomes - facilitation meets the purpose it sets out to achieve.

These elements could be regarded as key to the practice of the accomplished facilitator who will not only be aware of the implications of such standards but will also display the inherent skills. This blend of knowing what and knowing how will together create the pattern of professionalism that makes up their individual facilitator style and signature.

There is a particular aspect of working with groups that each facilitator needs to recognise and manage in the context of their role as a facilitator. I am referring to the interplay of relationships within any group that is often termed the 'group dynamic' and it is to this crucial term that I now turn my attention.

About the Group Dynamic

In considering the experience of distress as a facilitator I quickly made a link between this and the concept of group dynamics, a term that provides a shorthand description for the multitude of interactions that occur between people in a group setting. The dynamic that exists within any group can, and usually does, have an effect on all present and it is part of the facilitator's role to manage, contain or work with these interrelationships.

I have at times, irrationally perhaps, wondered if I am alone in my struggle with this aspect of facilitation. Fortunately I have heard many colleague facilitators say that there are times when balancing attention between the maelstrom of the group dynamic and one's own emotions is a very tricky business. (Actually they never said anything of the sort but I have decided against the use of expletives in my work. I hope that the moderate language I am using here will not disguise the real feelings of my colleagues!)

Heron (1999) refers to the group dynamic as:

“ ... a concept basic to all facilitation ... By the group dynamic I mean the combined configuration of mental, emotional and physical energy in the group at any given time; and the way this configuration undergoes change ... There is no reliable rule about how the dynamic will develop ... ”

Heron (1999: 50)

My own rule of thumb for the group dynamic is adapted from the work of John Heron (1989). I anticipate that most groups will go through stages that are roughly analogous to seasons of the year in that they may start off a little cool (winter), begin to show signs of new thinking (spring), warm to the task (summer) and then reap the harvest of their work (autumn).

At the early stages of group formation in the cool of the winter, the impact of the group dynamic may be unseen or unheard. As a facilitator one might sense that there is a proverbial 'elephant in the room'. Any attempts to name or even notice such a presence may be refuted and can lead to an internal

struggle within the facilitator who has to decide whether to confront the group or not. At the early stages the presence of difficulties within the group may not be explicit and the facilitator may be working more on hunch or intuition than on data. This may be based partly on experience and partly on observation of the current group.

At the later stages groups that are functional usually find ways to navigate and manage the dynamic. Tuckman (1965) describes the development of such a functional group using the idea of stages that he refers to as forming, norming, storming and performing. At a later date he added the fifth stage of adjourning, that is often referred to as mourning. This language will be familiar to many facilitators and I therefore do not describe this model in detail here.

As part of my ongoing commitment to comprehensive review, outlined earlier in my thesis, I made a direct enquiry to a number of colleagues to seek a range of professional views. I sent e-mails to nine people who facilitate groups, across a range of settings, asking for their first thoughts on what they regard as the meaning of the term group dynamic.

The e-mail asked:

Dear All

I wonder if you would be willing to offer your first thoughts on what the term 'group dynamics' means to you.

I have used this term several times in my developing thesis and felt a creative way of defining it would be to ask several colleagues, peers and friends. I see this as part of a comprehensive review strategy that holds experiential knowledge as highly as book knowledge.

I am particularly looking for first thoughts rather than thought through or researched stuff ...

Steve

E-mail sent – 08/04/2008

The responses came very quickly and I had replies from eight of the nine people canvassed. The following text box is an edited version of their responses:

(K) Relationships between individuals in a group that are affected by their emotional, behavioural, cognitive and spiritual preferences/ functioning. These can be overt and explicit within the group or hidden and implicit (which is where the real fun begins).

(L) The way in which the members of a group relate to one another and the facilitator (if there is one).

(G) How the behaviour of individuals in a group is influenced by the interactions between them, such as mass hysteria when hysteria in a few individuals infects the whole group. C) Group dynamics describes the relationship between the personalities within the group and how they interact with one another.

(Ju) An understanding of how the energy flows both in verbal and non-verbal communication between more than two people. E.g. in synergy blocked by individuals creates a dynamism bigger than any one individual could manifest, that can create or destroy. That there is usually one who speaks more than others and one who is very quiet that the synergy is kept at the level of the person with the lowest awareness of self and energy i.e. the weakest link

(A) The interaction between group members that can form patterns of behaviours and communications. I see that we are all linked energetically to each other, the setting we are in, the environment, our communities we are part of, i.e. work communities, social communities - our family, our neighbourhood, the world, the universe, spiritually, also previous generations/history are the building blocks of now, and how we perceive our world, etc. - this list is endless. I suppose all these elements are filtered in some way through us physically and psychologically and yet I have a sense that they also have a power of their own and therefore that will show themselves despite our filters. All these processes and connections have an impact on how we relate to each other. I have a sense that the whole is greater than the parts and the group has the potential to generate a lot of power - amazing things happen in groups.

(Ja) Group dynamics ... the interesting conscious and unconscious interactions between us, the impacts we have on each other, the inter-relatedness of people, and the instinctual 'herding' stuff....

(F) The way people are and behave in a group.

I am very grateful for the thoughts of these colleagues. Their breadth of ideas gives a comprehensive summary that will not be found in any other published or unpublished source.

A more orthodox approach to the literature uncovered the work of Arnold Mindell who captures the essence of working with the group dynamic in the title of his book 'Sitting in the Fire'. His poignant and reassuring words gave me some relief in the way that he seemed to really understand:

"Many people are afraid to step forward and facilitate groups. There's good reason to fear groups; their potential power is enormous. They can create in the facilitator a sense of being dominated, judged or shamed."

Mindell (1995: 33)

On discovering this work I realised that the giants (on whose shoulders I might stand) were emerging. There are of course others who know the complexities and difficulties inherent in attempting to facilitate groups, but Mindell stands out in the way that he offers hope for the future and suggests some reason to facilitate:

"Occasionally however, something happens when you immerse yourself in this work and let yourself be torn by it. You begin to realise that the very situations that are so impossible can also be your greatest teachers."

Mindell (1995: 47)

It has seemed to me that having a good reason to step into the fire is essential. Despite the possibility of distress one must be able to see, or at least sense, some motivation that makes the risk worthwhile. My review process has included conversations with colleagues and writers and one such exchange was with Bryce Taylor, whose work makes a regular appearance in my thesis. I made the following journal note that captures the essence of what he said about distress and facilitation:

It was very useful to hear what Bryce had to say about the experience of working at the centre of the fire. He recalled John Heron saying that excellence is about working with the distress as it happens.

Journal - 04/10/2004

This early journal entry was an indication that I would find encouragement from the voices of experience. This was reinforced much later on in my period of inquiry when I was part of a Cooperative Inquiry in New Zealand at the South Pacific Centre for Human Inquiry where John Heron lives and works. One comment stuck in my mind that relates to the concept of the group dynamic and potential pitfalls for facilitators. A participant had just received some challenging feedback on his attempt to facilitate a piece of learning. In his efforts to do so he had not fully anticipated noticed or acted on the mood of the group. John turned to him and said:

“ ... welcome to the facilitator doghouse ... ”

Heron (1 April 2007)

This comment seemed to capture the mood through empathetic recognition that the role of facilitator is not always easy. One can become engrossed in the act of facilitation and lose sight of the group participants. On such occasions the facilitator may begin to act from his or her own agenda. This shift from the central role of enabler may be distress driven but could have other roots - such as enthusiasm.

The issue of hierarchy can also have a big impact on the group dynamic through the appearance of the dynamic of rank or power within groups:

“The facilitators task is not to do away with the use of rank or power, but to notice them and make their dynamics explicit for the whole group to see.”

Mindell (1995:37)

The skill of the facilitator may be in noticing the dynamics as they are occurring. Making these explicit may require courage and determination and I am certain that facilitation of the group dynamic is not a skill to be learned by reading a manual. Experience must be gathered that can then be combined with the particular personality and strengths of the facilitator:

“The wise facilitator's ability does not rest on techniques or gimmicks or set exercises. Become aware of the process – and when you see this clearly, you can shed light on the process for others.”

The Tao

This attention to the process of the group and the dynamic interplay between the people present may be summarised in one cautionary yet liberating sentence. For me facilitation is based on consent and conversation. On the first point it seems to me that a facilitator can only facilitate if the group (and the individuals therein) allow this to occur. I strongly suggest that facilitation is a service to be offered rather than one that can be imposed.

On the second point, whatever other media or creative approach is utilised, conversation between people is the core form of communication on which progress will be based. When facilitating in any situation my aim is therefore to help to create the conditions in which the best conversation can be had.

I will now move on to look at the facilitator signature, a metaphor to illustrate the individual ways in which facilitators develop their unique approach. The following sections suggest a range of elements that may combine in a way that is uniquely recognisable in the way that the facilitator works.

Facilitator Signature

One of the common ways I have of looking at the world is to use metaphors. A metaphor is:

“An expression in which the person, action or thing referred to is spoken of as if it really were what it resembles, e.g. when a ferocious person is called a tiger.”

Chambers Concise Dictionary (2004)

I believe that such a way of expressing a point can throw light on a situation that literal description may miss. The metaphor of the facilitator signature is drawn from the work of John Heron:

“There are some imponderables about a person that constitute their given uniqueness and distinctiveness of being, and manifest unmistakably in the way they relate to others ... like a person’s signature in action. It is not acquired or created. It just becomes more fully revealed as behaviour becomes more and more authentic.”

Heron (1999: 335)

In some ways this can be likened to a written signature that is formed from letters of the alphabet. Each letter is recognisable alone but each needs to be put into combination with other letters in order to spell out ones name. The style of handwriting adopted by the individual allows this string of individual letters to develop in an idiosyncratic way.

A facilitator signature can also be construed as a collection of component parts that relate to aspects of facilitation that are particularly important to the individual in question and within the wider professional field. These aspects might include service, values, style, philosophy, skills and creativity combined in a unique mixture as the signature of presence that the facilitator displays in their work.

Furthermore it may be that the quality of presence transcends the component parts of the signature and is influenced by what we believe:

“ ... it is not simply what we are that determines the presence we portray but also what we believe ourselves to be. So our beliefs in the form of a self-concept affect the presence we display. If the facilitator is to display a presence which is supportive of learning then a high level of congruence between what he is, and what he thinks he is and how he presents himself will be required.”

According to J. Gregory (personal communication, December, 2005)

The following sections build on this balance between what we say, think and do and provide a series of glimpses into the component parts of my facilitator signature and what I believe about my professional work. These parts need to be in balance and my behaviour needs to be congruent in order that I may facilitate most effectively.

About Service

The notion of service has been significant to me for most of my professional life. It means taking a somewhat background role (as in the waiter analogy below) with an emphasis on the needs of the group - including attention to ensure that distress is not displaced from the facilitator onto the group. Whether I am viewed as a facilitator, coach or supervisor, my role is usually to

provide a conduit for the client's needs to be met. As a facilitator my general aim is to maintain a subtle presence whilst not taking centre stage.

When I was reflecting on an event that I facilitated in Summer 2007 a particular idea struck me that is pertinent to the importance I place on service. I used the analogy of being a waiter at a restaurant where a good, or excellent, waiter can be identified by his or her ability to know when to be at the table, never obvious, always subtle and inconspicuous. Such a waiter seems to be able to pick up the body language of the diners even when not in view to them. It now seems to me that the attributes of being an excellent waiter are in many ways analogous to excellence in facilitation with the presence of the person in each role being considerably better when subtle rather than intrusive.

As a facilitative waiter my signature is both gentle and patient. A colleague on a recent course suggested the acronym W.A.I.T. - meaning Why Am I Talking? This struck me as a useful 'in the moment' self-supervision question that helps me to avoid jumping in too quickly with my own analysis, tolerating silence through developing a good sense of when this feels distressed and being willing to wait for insights to emerge.

About Values

A dictionary definition suggests that values relate to ones:

"Moral principles or standards." Chambers Concise Dictionary (2004)

I recall a time during my early training in facilitation when one of the visiting facilitators to my diploma course responded to my challenging and negative feedback. When I expressed a complete inability to see usefulness in anything we were doing he responded by turning and saying, *"Isn't that interesting"*. The non-defensive nature of his response allowed the space for real dialogue between us about the issue and enabled him to explain in a way that made sense to me. I believe I was in the presence of a man who was

living his values. In the context of working as a facilitator, values may therefore be seen as being:

“ ... fundamentally about respect for participants ... It means showing all the time that you accept participants.”

Rogers (1999: 29)

More recently the work of Peter Robertson makes a strong case for the central role for values. His thoughts are not specifically related to the work of the facilitator but are nonetheless pertinent. He suggests that:

“The more you act in accordance with your values, the less disturbing the chaos around you becomes” ... “values are the only tools you have for achieving a long term and constructive effect.”

Robertson (2005: 88)

Others may express the same internal coherence as authenticity, i.e. being true to your self and not pretending to be something or someone you are not and I am increasingly convinced of the importance of this point. Quite recently I heard someone say that pretence is an enemy of authenticity and of presence. As I heard them speak I noted that changing just one letter in the word turns pretence into presence (and back again). I subsequently found a similar thought expressed in a professional journal:

“Presence ... feels effortless in its doing yet is receptive in its being. It is about giving ourselves fully to the experience of being with others and ourselves. There is no sense of pretence or worry about doing or performing.”

Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan (2007: 11)

I have frequently wondered what people being facilitated really value in the facilitator. A colleague recently summarised this as needing a witness; she suggested that people value the experience of being heard. This is a key part of my work, and I am particularly alert to the importance of listening well; to the words spoken and those left unsaid. This skill, based on my core values and beliefs, is at the heart of my facilitator signature and it is from the vast reservoir of things that I have heard that I draw my thesis. The distinctive autoethnographic nature of my work means that I have also consciously and steadfastly paid attention to and utilised those things I have overheard myself saying. This commitment echoes my attention to the words of my clients:

“The ongoing task for those of us that choose person-centredness as the core of our profession, is continued development of our capacity to be wholly and authentically present in the world, to abdicate power and control over others with whom we work.”

Natiello (2001:14)

About Style

Style can, in my view, be a distraction, a substitute for substance, a way of disguising or even deceiving. For me the style needs to be congruent with the substance and have a general intention to focus on the person or persons in receipt of the service of facilitation.

I had a fascinating e-mail correspondence with a man who had presented a learning session on the skills of negotiation. The material he used was familiar to me but his delivery utilised a very different style to my own. After the event I expressed an interest in his views on presence and was startled by his response that clearly focused on physical factors and outward signs. He suggested that presence is achieved through dressing up, deliberately more smartly than the client group and he specified suit, red tie and shiny shoes as the requisite dress code. When I responded by telling him that smart casual is my own preference he became more certain in his stance asserting that “there is nothing smart about casual!”

Journal – 25/10/05

I was and remain prepared to accept that this is a valid approach but this is not what I mean by presence and is not what I am trying to achieve. My own style relates to manner rather than dress sense and as I look for role models I recall the simplicity and poise of Jiddu Krishnamurti, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. These leaders had little need for the trappings of outward signs of power such as designer clothes and it is to their example that I aspire.

My aim is to be mindful, aware, gentle, sensitive and firm. I understand the potency of my own vulnerability and can usually gauge when and how to declare this in an appropriate way. I have accepted that uncertainty comes with the territory of being a facilitator. There is a fine balance between being uncertain and present and being uncertain and in distress.

I seek to balance support and challenge and believe that effective challenge is based on a clear and felt sense of support. It has been my experience that clients value challenge highly, but only after they have developed some trust in the supportive nature and intention of the one making the challenge.

As I consider my own strengths I note that beyond my commitment to listening there are two threads that run consistently through my work. I usually try to blend in some humour and have noticed how this often helps others to see the funny side of the situation at hand. I do not mean joke telling, although a well-timed intervention of this type can also work at times. I am particularly attracted to the use of situational humour. Here is one example that I have used to good effect:

I regularly meet groups within which there are different expectations about the need for positive feedback. In a typical situation the manager is happy with the worker and leaves them to get on with the job, but the worker feels that the manager's silence suggests that something is wrong. When this surfaces I tell of the story of a couple:

She says: "Do you love me?"

He says: "Of course I do!"

She says: "then why do you never tell me?:"

His response: "I have told you once and when the situation changes, I'll let you know."

I also use an extensive range of references, taken from diverse sources of literature, to illustrate and explain the point I am trying to make. My regular return to a favourite book – 'The Situation is Hopeless but not Serious' by Paul Watlazawick is an example of the blend between my use of humour and literature. I will not attempt to summarise this book here but trust that the title itself will be enough to encourage others to seek it out. One story from this source, that may be particularly pertinent here, relates to vulnerability and the human need to find a way to manage such a feeling:

"The basic pattern is contained in the story of the man who claps his hands every ten seconds. When asked the reason for this strange

behaviour, he replies, 'To chase away the elephants.' 'Elephants? But there aren't any around!' Whereupon the man says, 'Right. See, I told you so.' ..."

Watzlawick (1983: 53)

About Skills

Over many years of experience I have collected an ever increasing and evolving range of interventions that make up my metaphorical toolkit. These tools can be thought of as a range of techniques, that I use within an attitude or intention to serve, and have gradually become more refined and useful. Where once I had a hammer and chisel I now have a set of each for use in many different situations. I also realise that these are not the only tools, indeed if all one has is a hammer one may see every problem as a nail. I am increasingly at ease developing a new tool if the situation so demands; where existing approaches are not sufficiently flexible for the matter in hand and it is within this spirit of creativity that the expert facilitator operates.

About Creativity

I have a particular interest in developing new ways of working, particularly those that are contextually useful. At times this may mean attending to my own learning through studying on courses or finding role models to help me develop my practice. At other times I try different things in my work as a facilitator and I offer two examples from my recent practice at this point. The first is an example of my own creativity; the second is an example of my facilitation prompting others to be creative.

From my own repertoire I have developed an exercise that I call 'quick literature search' that I have used successfully in my group work. I have realised that time spent on pre-prepared reading material is seldom useful as, in my experience, participants rarely read what they receive in advance of an event. Instead I bring an array of relevant literature to the learning session, ask individuals to take one piece and read the whole or part, make notes and be prepared to feedback any key points, insights and learning. As they relate

their learning to colleagues I take further notes and create an annotated reference list that I send to participants after the event. Feedback has always been positive when I have used this approach.

The second example relates to a group considering the practical meaning of risk assessment and management in the field of mental health services. After theory and policy input from me the group members worked out how this may apply to their day-to-day work and several sub-groups prepared a presentation for the plenary session. One sub-group created an amusing, powerful and meaningful drama that used the children's story *The Three Little Pigs* to illustrate the different levels of risk. They then developed a tool based on this story to help them to recognise high, medium and low risk behaviours in their practice with clients and, most importantly, to consider what the service response should prioritise. Once again feedback was excellent and learning was powerful.

The ability to be creative may be most potent when the facilitator is at ease and therefore operating from a distress free presence. Over the period of the doctoral inquiry I note my increasing trust that I will remember just the right thing to say at just the right time. I frequently express the thought that pops into my head, especially when it seems to insist on being used! I am certain that my creative confidence has been enhanced through the attention that my inquiry has demanded of me. The next section shows a key example of how my thinking became a model that I presented to a community of peers in late 2006.

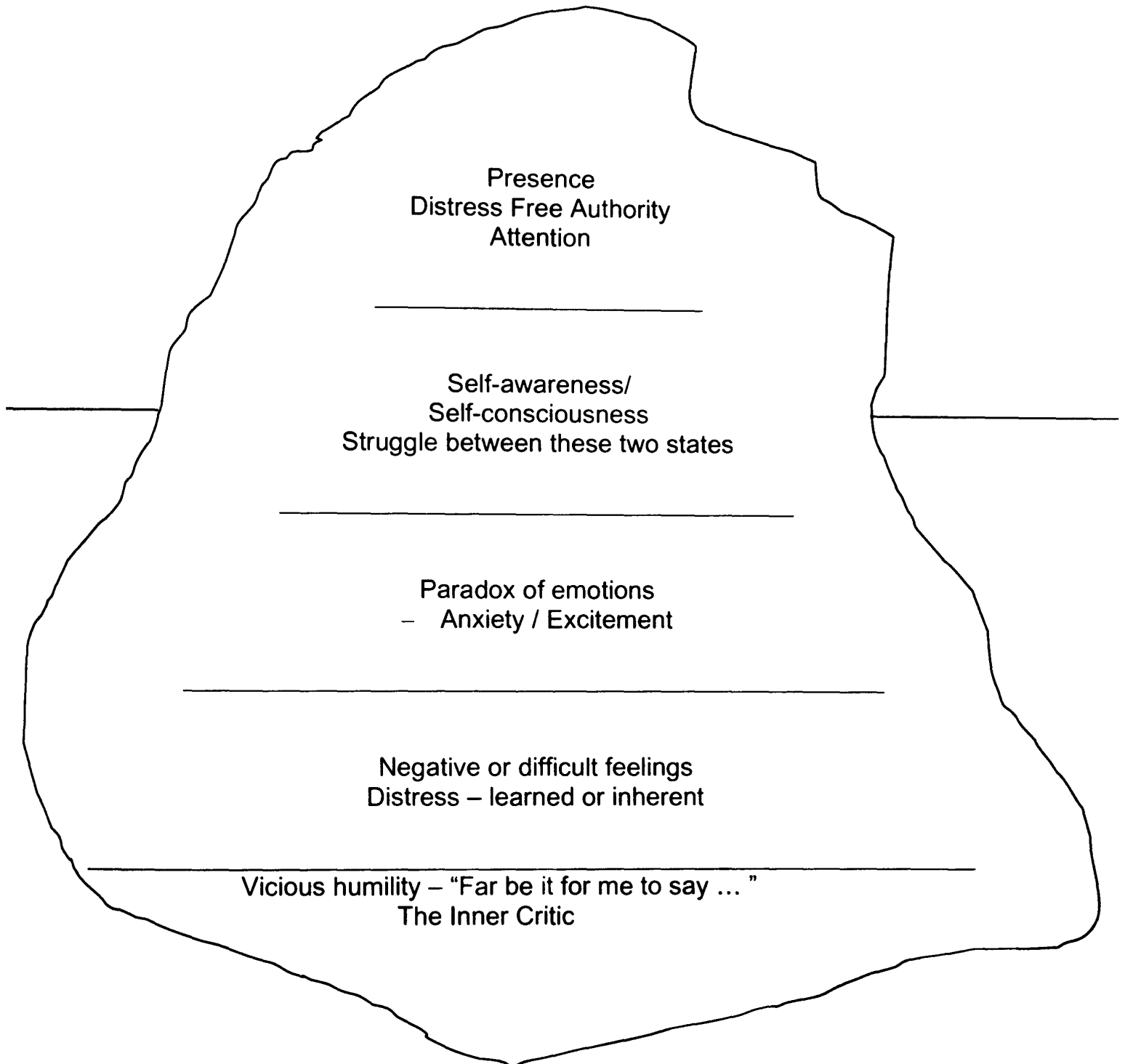
My Thoughts Emerge as a Model

At approximately the mid-point of my DProf inquiry I was asked to co-facilitate a session at a network meeting of fellow professionals, most of whom were experienced facilitators. My co-facilitator on the day was responsible for providing theoretical input on the nature and application of creativity in organisations. My role was to support this input with a balance between

facilitating the ensuing discussion and attempting to offer my own insights into the nature and experience of facilitation.

As I planned my input, the following model emerged:

THE ICEBERG MODEL



This model could ultimately become my fully formed map of facilitator presence and even in its current raw state may help colleagues by drawing attention to areas of particular discomfort that they notice in their practice of

facilitation. This may then support them to develop a coherent learning strategy for their development. I offer an extended summary of my model at this point although this may interrupt the general flow of my thesis. I believe that this prolonged intrusion is relevant in the light of:

- i) The importance of this model to my overall autoethnography – it conveys an essence that I have been striving to uncover.
- ii) A need to underline the difficulty I have had in working within the separate strands of the four academic components of the DProf described earlier.

My model encapsulates practice development, narrative, comprehensive review and inquiry and these key components of the iceberg show a series of increasingly deep levels as follows:

- Level One is above the water level and relates to presence, distress free authority and attention
- Level Two is at the surface and is about the balance between self awareness and self consciousness
- Level Three is just below the surface where there is a paradox of emotions
- Level Four is deeper and is the domain of distress
- Level Five is 'at the bottom of the ocean' and contains the deeper questions of identity and self-worth; where distress emanates from a critical inner voice.

Level One

At and above the surface of the metaphorical water I see presence as a state in which the facilitator would be able to, with awareness and discrimination, utilise all that is happening in the moment above and below the surface of the group experience and within their own being. This manifestation of working is graceful and artistic and could be thought of as the peak condition. This is not to deny the need to develop technical skills or to have background knowledge

of a particular subject, but the combination of attention and distress free authority that lies behind the facilitator's ability to be present is simply about being there, with and for the group. It is not about virtuoso performances as it is beyond the notion of performance. When I enter into this realm I am wholly myself.

I had a good sense of using my whole self yesterday ... like just after lunch when I had to take hold of my authority, be flexible and yet firm. The thing that struck me was the way I have to sometimes balance an authoritative stance with the spirit of making a request. When I am in flow this balance just works, and yesterday it did!

Journal – 14/07/05

Level Two

At the next level, just below the surface the model alludes to the need for a balance between self-awareness, (generally regarded to be a good thing) and self-consciousness (generally regarded as an unhelpful thing) when facilitating. It is this balance that is disturbed when presence becomes awkward, although the disturbance does not usually occur in a single moment. There seems to be no definite law that governs this aspect of facilitation in that the moment of disturbance may initially in fact enhance my self-awareness and be useful not only to myself but at times for the group.

In the following example there was learning in the situation for me, and for the programme on which I was sharing facilitation:

Felt completely flat. Why? I hate working to pre-prepared material, there is so little room to facilitate. The material is good but the case studies do not cross from group to group – we were just stuck with them.

Journal – 12/07/05

My experience of distress was minor and I was able to facilitate through my realisation that the material was not appropriate for the group.

Level Three

The balance described at level two may be experienced throughout the facilitation until there is some point on the continuum that is beyond the useful (if uncomfortable) self-awareness. It is at this point that my emotional state is touched and I am grateful to include the following passage that neatly summarises my own experience:

“ ... various events trigger your own reactions ... When the group is feeling confused and uncertain how to proceed in their task, you may be feeling the same way about the facilitation. If your actions do not help the group as well as you would like, you may feel ashamed because your work doesn't meet your own standards. You may be frustrated by a group's inability to manage conflict even if you have been asked to help the members because they are having problems managing conflict. You may feel sad watching a group act in a way that creates the very consequences the members are trying to avoid, feel happy that you can identify this dynamic in the group, and feel hopeful seeing that the group's pain is creating motivation for change.”

Schwartz (2002: 14)

I have experienced all of these feelings and the accompanying ways in which I label my experience. On a general note I find it difficult to discern the difference between that feeling I call excitement and the one I call anxiety. Making a positive distinction can depend on a wide range of emotional and contextual factors that I have not yet fully fathomed although I do recognise that when:

“I am operating freely and with a contemporary awareness. I am neither importing judgements nor fears from the past, nor anticipating concerns and anxieties about the future.”

Taylor (2007: 68)

My internal labelling influences my consequent thinking and behaviour and a negative choice may lead to a vicious cycle during which I encounter the inner conversation that is depicted at the deeper level of my Iceberg Model that I refer to as the paradox of emotion. As a facilitator I am always dealing with this internal (or possibly infernal!) chatter, which is of course influenced by my past experience. The degree to which I can ignore this noise correlates with the degree to which I can facilitate most effectively. For example, awareness

of anxiety inside myself, used with skill in the act of facilitation leads me towards greater presence. On the other hand, if the feelings that I experience relate to a deeper psychological disturbance within my psyche, beyond my conscious grasp or current level of psychological development, then I may struggle to use them in a positive way, as in the following example

A dispiriting and disheartening day! It is days like this that really make me wonder about the value of what I do ... have we done more harm than good ... I was stunned when S. left the group with no warning especially as she knew that we had all rearranged our diaries to be there ...

Journal 23/01/07

A key person leaving disturbed my equilibrium and I had an internal conversation that transposed an assumption with certainty. This led my thinking down a slippery slope to self-doubt. I later learned that S. had left a clear message to say that she had another commitment to get to!

Level Four

This is the domain of distress where my ability to be present is lost to the greatest degree. It is at this level that the facilitator will have an inability to hold attention to the outside world of the group due to the distraction of the inner world. At this level self-consciousness has overwhelmed self-awareness and emotions are clearly labelled as negative and difficult. My thesis includes several examples of how this manifested in my own practice. There is one outstanding example of this depth of distress that I refer to in detail later in my thesis (in the section entitled My Autoethnography), where I describe both the example and the consequences. Arguably it was this example that stimulated my whole inquiry. At this point in my work suffice to say that I felt like the proverbial rabbit in the headlights!

Level Five

I have tentatively included this deeper level, below the more obvious sense of distress as I think that this relates to those aspects of the facilitator that are the most hidden from the public persona.

When I first presented this model, as indicated above, I spoke of the way people can hide their true thoughts and abilities behind a smokescreen of self-deprecating words, for example:

- 'Well of course I am no expert, but it seems to me'... or
- 'Ignorant as I am I hesitate to express an opinion' ...

I referred to this tendency as *vicious humility* and it was intended to be light hearted, a way of emphasising the point in a humorous way. As I presented these ideas I heard my own false modesty in the background, echoed by the very words I was speaking. This modesty is probably based on fear of rejection though, paradoxically, is equally likely to be fear of acceptance in that being known as an expert increases expectations and a sense of pressure to perform. This can have a detrimental effect on my ability.

On reflection the part of me that is held in this place of vicious humility may be my own main enemy as I strive to develop presence. This vicious humility is, in my view, a close relative of the Inner Critic, a character I explore at greater length elsewhere in my thesis. At this point I recall an early entry in my journal:

This thinking has the effect of keeping me stuck ... as if I need a fatal flaw to keep me grounded ... to prevent me from becoming arrogant, but, if I took this away what would happen?

Journal – 19/10/04

The question I posed remains valid!

The Link to Presence

As I presented this work for the first time I spoke authentically about my own experience of presence, noting the disturbances that I feel from time to time, and relating this to what I was feeling in that moment. I then facilitated a short discussion that linked this personal map to the more theoretical material presented earlier by my co-facilitator. Feedback was excellent and very instrumental in the shift that my inquiry was making from its roots in distress to the more optimistic and positive focus on presence.

About Presence

The notion of presence gradually came to me as an unfolding picture rather like the appearance of dots on the page of a child's drawing book that slowly join to create a coherent and recognisable whole. I realise that presence may be an issue for most human beings, in their family, intimate and work relationships and in their spiritual life and I therefore do not overstate the case for presence being associated with facilitation.

There are however some hints in the literature that included explicit links to facilitator presence that are particularly encouraging. For example I found one reference that explicitly mentioned facilitator authority, the phrase that originally stimulated my inquiry:

"As a facilitator you need to have personal presence. You need to be able to create an impression of reliability, steadiness and authority. But like most kinds of effective leadership, this authority is most effective when lightly worn."

Rogers (1999: 89)

In relation to my autoethnography what I mean by presence relates to the art/craft/ability/gift of being present, here and now (throughout the period of the facilitation contract) to the group or individual that I am facilitating. The way we present ourselves may vary according to the context we are in. For example I find it relatively easy to locate and sustain my presence with individuals and increasingly difficult as groups get bigger. When I am at my

best my presence, or attention is entirely focused on the group or individual I am there to facilitate, and I maintain vigilance regarding what is happening within my own psychological, emotional and physical being:

“Presence is influenced enormously by our ability to manage ourselves, especially when old patterns of behaving and habitual ways of being threaten to engulf us. It relates to how we present ourselves to others, how we feel about ourselves and, crucially, our willingness – or not – to bring our whole being into relationship with the other.”

Taylor (2007: 49)

Striving for such a sense of (w)holism in my relationship with others in group settings seems to me to be a high ideal, possibly a triumph of hope over experience. I am reassured by Santorelli (1999) who writes about the humanity of the carer in helping relationships and the daily lessons in humility that come about through being confronted with difficulties that we may have no idea how to tackle. This is part of my experience as a facilitator:

“ ... if, in these moments, we learn to stop and be present, we have a chance to learn a lot. In these moments, no matter what our role, so much seems to be at stake, so much of our identity ripe for loss, uncertainty, or displacement. And so we often turn quietly away ... none of us wishes to be hurt ... ”

Santorelli (1999: 32)

He comments on the potential for positive use of such experience by suggesting that the discipline of taking an alert attitude of willingness to stop in such moments and be present:

“ ... leads to seeing and relating to circumstances and events with more clarity and directness. Out of this directness seems to emerge deeper understanding or insight ... Such insight allows us the possibility of choosing responses most called for by the situation rather than those reactively driven by fear, habit, or long-standing training.”

Santorelli (1999: 32)

When fully present I am alert to how my own senses may inform me about the client/group but I have wondered whether being present is simply an act of will. However one of the problems I have found when I am attempting to deliberately facilitate from an authentic state of presence is that I become (at times) acutely aware of disturbances to that sense of presence. Even thinking

about being present can be enough to interrupt and stop the flow. I know from experience that presence:

“ ... clearly cannot be done if there's a little me there that's saying, 'Oh! I'm manifesting presencing'.”

Senge et al (2005: 101)

Presence can be subtle. Senge and his colleagues imply strongly that presence can be an inner state in which self is forgotten and the facilitator seems to merge with the group:

“I am the audience and they are me. When this happens I know with certainty that whatever arises is exactly what needs to arise at that moment ... becoming totally present – to the larger space or field around us, to an expanded sense of self, and, ultimately to what is emerging through us.”

Senge et al (2005: 90)

I have frequently heard colleague facilitators speak about days when something seems to come through them; they talk of being in the zone or the flow as if the ability to facilitate arises from within, or possibly unbidden from outside oneself.

For other facilitators presence relates to the impression that they can make on others. As I commented earlier, a focus on creating an impression has long concerned me and I do believe that the line between pretence and presence may be a fine one and I emphasise that I see presence a state not a stage. By this I mean that it is not something to be achieved once and for all, indeed it has even been suggested to me that one cannot achieve it all, it may be in a Holy Grail. I hold the position that:

“The place of presence is not found once and then held in perpetuity, although it does have a sense of continuity about it.”

Taylor (2007: 49)

This may be in part due to the relatively unpredictable nature of emotions.

Presence and Emotions

Despite cultivating a general attention to be present there are times of disturbance when something may be touched (or even touched off) within me, usually very quickly. It can take me by surprise and make me immediately aware of my state of being no longer fully present. I may become lost within my own experience rather than present to the group experience. I do not always regard this as distress but usually notice a disturbance in my presence. On most occasions I can return my attention to the room, making a mental note to reconsider this later, in the context of my professional supervision, where I can reflect more slowly on my practice, away from the heat of the moment.

From an emotional perspective I have noticed a range of feelings, that occur in my stomach/digestive system or around my throat, that disturb my presence and to which I then attach an emotional label such as excitement or anxiety. These are very similar experiences but when I regard them as anxiety they can create a significant disturbance within me. Heron (1987) specifies the particular negative effects of anxiety emphasising that it may be the key barrier to presence:

“The enemy of presence is anxiety. Actors often have a lot of fear before going onto the stage. It usually goes once they are out front, with the secure content of rehearsed lines, which they can fill with presence. But extempore speech in everyday life may often generate a lot of subtle anxiety.”

Heron (1987: 9)

The way that I facilitate is closer to daily life and infrequently scripted in any but the most minor way. This may partly explain why, in my own experience and through conversation with others, I have noted that the feeling of anxiety is a common experience for facilitators in that the ongoing lack of certainty may invoke a sense of vulnerability – especially when the facilitator feels overly responsible for the group. In relation to the professional practice of working with groups if one is to continue then this emotional state will probably need attention and possibly remedial action:

“For some facilitators this hurdle can be overcome by rehearsal or by helping them to relax but for others some significant personal development work may need to be done before presence in the face-to-face situation can be consistently achieved.”

Jarvis (2002: 86)

All of the above points place a strong degree of personal and professional responsibility on the person who would be a facilitator. A colleague makes an explicit link between development work and what may be referred to as emotional competence:

“Perhaps the most common cause of lack of presence is an inability on the part of the facilitator to manage their emotions in a constructive way.”

According to J. Gregory (personal communication, December, 2005)

The importance of tackling and resolving the impact of such old patterns and habits is well put by authors who refer to the words of Bill O'Brien a senior manager working in the insurance sector:

“The success of an intervention depends on the inner condition of the intervener.”

Senge et al (2005: 180)

One practical consequence of this is that group facilitators may need to acquire a sort of neutral expression, an ability to portray an appearance of neutrality. This may mean developing a way to experience feelings in a detached way, maybe as a part of the case, without being too distracted. This may be a skill of *doing* that is about consciously containing emotions within self and, in some ways, on behalf of the group.

Beyond the challenge to accept responsibility and take action to develop ones emotional ability I find much encouragement in the words above in that there is a strong inference that it is possible to alleviate distress and cultivate presence. Indeed to some degree simply being there (present) is a natural state, and I suspect that this occurred with little thought or conscious effort during my early days as a facilitator. As I have become more experienced I may have also become more affected by nuances of group behaviour as I have become more aware of them. This point contrasts somewhat with the

idea that the problem may be more acute in the case of inexperienced facilitators who at times may:

“ ... present themselves in a way which may be distracting, inhibiting and even derisory. This may distract attention from the change process that are facilitating and may even create an atmosphere of insecurity or discomfort. This may result from a lack of centredness in the facilitator accompanied by debilitating fixation on what others may be thinking of them. It may of course also be the result of other factors, for example lack of assimilation and grounding in the subject matter of personal, group or organisational change or poor communication skills.”

According to J. Gregory (personal communication, December, 2005)

Overall I take the optimistic stance that presence, as a facilitator and within the wider experience of life, is certainly attainable. It occurs, sometimes naturally or spontaneously to all people at some times and whilst it may be difficult to develop in an intentional way it is certainly possible to create the best conditions in which it may be cultivated and therefore more likely to occur and be experienced.

Presence and the Inner Critic

In my own experience an inability to be truly ‘in the moment’ is most often accompanied by the voice of my inner critic, speaking from within, the voice that insists on being heard. It is to this phenomenon that I now return, following a brief description noted in the section on my Iceberg Model above.

I work in a freelance capacity and have often quipped that it is great to be self-employed but the boss is a tyrant. It is in relation to group facilitation that the tyrant is at his most tyrannical and developing presence in the face of this internal critic may be related to the extent to which I can build:

“ ... the capacity to suspend the judgements that arise in our minds ... ”
Senge et al (2005: 30)

These authors refer to this inner self-critic as the ‘Voice of Judgement’ that is a harsh and enduring companion that imposes an entirely negative perspective on thoughts. I have noticed how this voice can increase in intensity during or immediately after events that I facilitate. I have an

accompanying tendency to exaggerate negative feedback and look upon criticism in an over-sensitive fashion. This is not an entirely personal difficulty in that I have learned that many others, in similar roles, have acknowledged this bias. One practical way I have found to manage this difficulty is to ensure that I do not read evaluation sheets immediately after an event that I have facilitated.

Gregory notes the way in which such responses to criticism may combine with a more general lack of confidence. She highlights the way in which this can happen within the session facilitated and hints at the post-event experience to which I have referred:

“Most facilitators will have experienced lack of confidence to a greater or lesser degree. This lack of confidence will usually be obvious from the facilitator’s dependence on various crutches or devices, their hesitations, uncertainty, etc. ... it is also common for many practitioners to find their competence and achievement blocked by a negative self concept.”

According to J. Gregory (personal communication, December, 2005)

This work links directly to the Iceberg Model that I outlined earlier. It is at the levels below the surface of experience where this uncertainty can combine with the ever-watchful and critical voice of judgement. When these two factors are reinforced by challenge from the group the combination may evoke strong feelings in the facilitator from which many difficulties can ensue.

It may be possible, even advisable to be open about such difficulties and this is certainly recommended in the context of reflecting on ones practice, after the event, in the context of a supportive supervisory relationship. I strongly recommend supervision to anyone willing to sit in the fire of group processes as an adjunct to their practice.

On a slightly different tack it may also be possible to use this sort of internal experience to inform the use of self-disclosure within a group, even in the moment of discomfort, as a legitimate form of intervention. This is the focus of the next section.

Presence as Self-disclosure

It may be that if one does not have the ability, outlined earlier, to be always aware of one's feelings and yet stand to one side of them, then it is highly probable that the impact will be more noticeable to the group at large. Group members may either directly notice discomfort in the facilitator or be more subtly aware, sensing that something is not quite right. In my experience this usually has an impact on the group process but there may be ways to capitalise on this impact.

It is important to note that:

"Besides the non-verbal presentation ... you may or may not disclose something of your background, your knowledge, attitudes, goals, needs, etc. Disclosure may help or inhibit the learning process and the building of the relationship necessary for your interventions to be effective. Being aware of how you present yourself and appropriately choosing what to disclose and how and when to disclose it will enhance your facilitation."

According to J. Gregory (personal communication, December, 2005)

My long-term inquiry into distress and presence has allowed me to realise that this approach to self-disclosure is an integral part of my facilitator signature and that this in turn relates to my sense of honesty and integrity. This does not mean constantly or thoughtlessly bombarding the group with a commentary on my emotional state but may mean a judicious sharing of my current state. I may for example wonder out loud if my own feelings are a reflection of the emotional state prevalent in the group at large. This is, I believe, a bona fide type of intervention:

"The feeling function tells us whether something is right for us or not. Unfortunately, many of us have long ago lost contact with this resource and even deliberately override its directives in order to be productive. We do not choose feelings; feelings are autonomous, qualitative analyses of our life. We can only choose to make those feelings conscious, and then decide whether or not to act on them."

Hollis (1996: 75)

In articulating this point, Hollis signposts my next section, which refers to use of all of our personhood as part of our developing presence.

Presence and Whole Person Learning

Many of the points I have already noted regarding presence are consistent with the concept of *Whole Person Learning* articulated by Bryce Taylor (2007). His recent book brings together past influences, current challenges and future aspirations in an extensive account of the importance of education that involves all aspects of personhood. With regard to the implications for my own work he offers the following encouragement saying that:

“Inherent within this concept of being a whole person is the notion of presence: of a person striving to be wholly present to oneself, whilst also being present with and to the other(s). Engagement with others is a prerequisite for such presence to be both valued and for it to develop.”

Taylor (2007: 49)

This is fundamental to my own exploration of presence as a facilitator. Facilitation is not an activity that is carried out alone – it always requires relationship with those facilitated. The more fully engaged that the facilitator can be, the more present they become. In recognising the importance of relationship I particularly note that presence moves beyond being there and into being there with the person(s) facilitated. This underlines the point I made earlier about consent. I have not found it possible to facilitate without the willing co-operation of those facilitated. This co-operation could also be described as connectedness:

“ ... connectedness between the ‘outer world’ of manifest phenomena and the ‘inner world’ of lived experience, and, ultimately, connectedness among people and between humans and the larger world.”

Senge et al (2005: 188)

This use of the concept of connectedness helps me to remain attentive in my practice with clients and I recall a previous supervisor, many years ago, reminding me that my own frailties and inconsistencies of thought and action could be considered as the necessary ground in which to discover and ultimately utilise empathy. I do wonder if empathy is a particularly human

form of the transpersonal and end this section on that note as a way of introducing the next.

Presence and the Transpersonal

It would be remiss of me to leave the notion of presence without a significant and respectful mention of that part of life variously referred to as spiritual, transpersonal, mystical, etc. The inclusion of a section on the transpersonal has seemed to be both obligatory and impossible. The transpersonal is an ongoing theme of my inquiry that remains tantalisingly all around me and infuriatingly out of reach.

Several of my colleagues, from counsellors to facilitators, have embarked on inter-doctrinal studies and I note that the desire to know more in this area is not just a personal one. There is a detectable movement towards considering spiritual matters in the context of the workplace where people are usually asked to make some personal connection to a shared sense of values, ethos or culture. This seems to me to signal a tendency to look deeper than a focus on manufacturing product or delivering a service.

My upbringing and the religious tradition of my early family had an impact on my thinking that would be foolish to deny. I suspect that this impact would be recognisable whatever tradition I had been born into. Later in the thesis I cite authors, mainly writing from a phenomenological perspective, who note the influence of the context of birth (time, place and circumstances), on our subsequent life. For example as a child regular visits to the confessional box were required:

... one piece of feedback from a supervisor was that I seem to agonise over my work ... Maybe I should look again at the sacrament of reconciliation, it used to be called confession ... I recall getting feedback that my self-disclosure was surprising ... Why do I disclose? I wonder if my thesis is one big visit to the confessional but I must move this on to reconcile ...

Journal – 14/4/06

Given that I am not quite being able to articulate my current spiritual position and my sense interference or background noise from my past I have simply offered a glimpse into some of the sources of support that I respect on this issue.

1. I return to the work of John Heron, who has considered this subject at length and I note that his writing on the transpersonal has developed through his own life work. Each version of his evolving thinking has been an advance on the previous one. The title of one of his early books, 'Helping the Client' (Heron: 1990), was the fourth iteration of his Six Category Intervention Analysis – I explain this concept more thoroughly elsewhere in my thesis. The idea of helping clients suggests a concern with the practical aspects of being a helper, whilst his more recently published book, 'Participatory Spirituality: A Farewell to Authoritarian Religion' (Heron: 2006) is a more explicit call to the transpersonal.
2. There are many spiritual and philosophical traditions and teachers that may provide further guidance and help to deepen thinking, including the following:
 - Christianity – the Bible
 - Buddhism - e.g. the work of Thich Nhat Hanh (2001), a Vietnamese Buddhist who has written widely
 - Dzogchen – linked to some schools of Buddhism, Dzogchen relates to the achievement of a natural state of complete and perfect awareness, through simply being, see for example the work of Rinpoche (2003)
 - The work of Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895- 1986) – he regarded truth to be a pathless land and recommended that those seeking to learn should always go to the source of any teaching as subsequent commentary distorts original meaning.
3. There are also models or systems of thinking that emanate from the psychological or psychotherapeutic field that deserve attention. For example Roberto Assagioli (1888-1974) is famous for the development of

a collection of techniques and exercises that go beyond theory and emphasise the place of intuition and creative insight. He depicts his model using a famous diagram of an egg, which focuses on the concept of consciousness. My own source is Parfitt (1994).

As I reflect on this glimpse of the field my realisation expressed at the start of this section that I do not do justice to either the work of the authors or the extent of the questions raised is reinforced. I do not see this as a gap in my work, in the sense that I could or should have done more in this area. Instead I regard my awareness as a support for the increasing sense I have had throughout the doctoral journey, that there is a vast expanse of knowledge that I will never have.

Maybe this realisation is at the heart of the transpersonal.

I now leave this discussion on the various aspects of presence and move on to present my thinking on methodology. I will not only show the theoretical positions occupied by a range of methodologies, but also my developing stance that culminated in the use of autoethnography as the research foundation for my inquiry.

METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

Throughout my thesis I have consistently claimed a link between the central issue of my inquiry (facilitator presence) and my key methodology (autoethnography). As I progressed through the writing up process I changed my mind several times on the running order of the final account. One particular difficulty was finding an appropriate place for the methodology section.

In the end I decided to locate the methodology section at this juncture, immediately after the section that explores presence. I hope that by doing so the connection between issue and methodology will be strengthened and the depth of my thinking around the core research question will be exposed.

As a parallel to the way that presence emerged as my central concern my methodological choices gradually infiltrated my work as the inquiry proceeded. A repeating point I make in my writing relates to the way that this methodological section, and indeed the thesis, may give a false impression of a clear developmental path. I hope that by writing as if progress was sequential the reader will gain a broad view of the general chronology of my decisions. I give only a glimpse of the ebb and flow inherent in deciding on my methodology. Please join me on a trip down methodology lane.

My initial thoughts on methodology included consideration of whether my eventual work would be seen as:

- Research or Inquiry
- Art or Science
- Story or History

These questions were particularly pertinent to me as I considered my initial leanings toward autoethnography and the early discouragement that I experienced from some academic colleagues. As I proceeded, there were a

series of points at which the decision to take the autobiographical '*road less travelled*' (Peck, 1978) became particularly obvious. The reader will have already gleaned a sense of this road on which each point was marked by my struggle to get past the imperative of trying to conform to academic norms ... even where those rules existed only in my own imagination.

As I questioned the validity of such internally imposed restrictions I became interested in approaches that not only permitted but also honoured the experience of the researcher through an unambiguous, focused and aware use of data emanating directly from the researcher. During the first year of my DProf I made an entry in my journal noting my preliminary thinking on a possible methodological map:

Sense of imaginative research:

- *Autoethnography*
- *Phenomenology*
- *Ethnography*
- *Narrative*

Journal - 20/01/05

This journal entry was made at a time when my knowledge of any of the methodologies in this list was very limited. In hindsight it seemed to forecast my later thinking very accurately and was an excellent, if unconscious, signpost to my eventual stance. As you will see, by the end of this section I expose all of these methodologies as key influences, adding the substantial contribution of heuristic research.

I spent time trying to develop a practical basis on which I could make a sensible methodological decision, even if this was to be provisional. The decision to reject and then later embrace autoethnography is the key exception to this rule, in that I encountered autoethnography at a very early stage of my inquiry but immediately put it to one side. I did not at that time have the confidence to back my own judgement that this was the correct way

forward for me. Instead I allowed the voices of more experienced academics to influence my thinking.

On a more progressive note the journey I followed in my search for an alternative to autoethnography enabled me to clarify how other methodologies support my inquiry and this in turn has enabled me to be more definitively autoethnographic and my thesis to be a more complete work. My journey through the alternatives has also confronted me with the poverty of my knowledge and thinking and this has encouraged me to be more modest in my claim to knowledge. I sense that my post-doctoral work will be the better for this as well. When I consider, as an example, the work of John Heron, I cannot but wryly reflect that although he has taught me much of what I know he certainly has not taught me everything of what he knows!

Nonetheless, I will start with some general definitions and terms from the field of research and then move on to explore the way in which I addressed the questions raised in the context of my autoethnographic inquiry.

Epistemology and Ontology

In addressing the key components of methodology I found the “*six core questions (one for each day of the week plus a day left over to integrate your answers)*”, articulated by Patton (2002), to be a helpful guide. In this section I deal with the first two questions that he raises – ontology and epistemology, as these are issues to be addressed in any research endeavour:

- *“What do we believe about the nature of reality? (ontological debates concerning the possibility of a singular, verifiable reality vs. the inevitability of socially constructed multiple realities)*
- *How do we know what we know? (epistemological debates about the possibility and desirability of objectivity, subjectivity, causality, validity, generalisability).”*

Patton (2002: 134)

The field of ontology is concerned with what there is to know in all that exists. I note that the way in which authors express the spirit of discovery that may be at the heart of all research:

“The starting point of all sciences is the astonishment at the fact that things are what they are.”

Robertson (2005: 107)

I cannot claim to have been astonished at the start of my own inquiry but I had an intense curiosity that was supported by the strong interest that many colleagues showed regarding my study. I recall being startled that I seemed to have hit a rich seam of interest but, on the issue of reality, I do not believe my experience to be any more real than the experience of others. My ontological position is to reflect on my own experience of the reality of facilitation in the hope and belief that it will contain something of a wider reality, especially in relation to the presence of a facilitator.

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge; it is about learning how we come to know things. The central questions addressed by this aspect of research include:

“ ... the origins of knowledge, the place of experience in generating knowledge, and the place of reason in doing so; the relationship between knowledge and certainty, and between knowledge and the possibility of error; the possibility of universal scepticism; and the changing forms of knowledge that arise from new conceptualisations of the world.”

Blackburn (2005: 118)

There is a wealth of material available that explores the concepts covered in this excerpt and I recognise that there is great potential to add depth and width to my future learning through developing my understanding of this area of research. I am however reassured by Patton (2002) who comments:

“My practical (and controversial) view is that one can learn to be a good interviewer or observer, and learn to make sense of the resulting data, without first engaging in deep epistemological reflection and philosophical study ... Getting some field experience first, then studying philosophy of science has much to recommend it as a learning strategy. Otherwise it is all abstractions.”

Patton (2002: 69)

Of course I need to find a way of showing that my work is not haphazard or academically lazy. I want to show, even to myself, that this thesis is worthy of the award it seeks to achieve. My particular aspiration is that my final thesis will be a strong statement of where I stand with regard to facilitation, my profession of choice, i.e. to know what I know and articulate this with clarity.

I also trust that this aspiration, if it is fulfilled, will enable me to be a more competent, proactive and effective professional practitioner. This seems to me to be the most desirable and useful outcome of a professional doctorate. I feel certain that my writing will manifest elsewhere in due course. Maybe the Kaleidoscope Section of my thesis will evolve into a learning manual, possibly my thoughts on autoethnography will be accepted for publication.

Overall, I see the epistemological position arising as a result of my work, rather than as the foundation on which I built my work. To continue the building metaphor, my epistemology is the roof that covers and shelters rather than the stone that underpins and supports. As an autoethnographer I have navigated this apparent departure from the principles of research by trusting that the inquiry itself would gradually, and consistently, show the way forward to my developing understanding of facilitator presence. The epistemological question is to some degree forfeited and replaced by an account of how I came to know, i.e. what I learned through engaging with a rigorous and prolonged inquiry that constantly allows for new insights and consequential changes of direction in my thinking. In this way my epistemological position remains in an emergent state. As Gadamer comments that:

“ ... the human sciences are connected to modes of experience that lie outside science: with the experiences of philosophy, of art and of history itself. These are all modes of experience in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by methodological means proper to science.”

Gadamer (1975: xxii)

My determination to be open to surprise throughout my inquiry may be in marked contrast to other researchers, some of whom start with an epistemological position from which methodology, method, data collection,

data analysis and presentation flow as logical consequences and each stage of the research proceeds from the previous one. I have taken the stance that:

"To be a philosopher involves being capable of being surprised at routine events, at day to day things, and settings."

Robertson (2005: 104)

I particularly note the occasion, some months into writing up my thesis, when one supervisor commented on my ongoing openness to new ideas. He suggested that this was unusual for a doctoral student and yet it seemed to be particularly appropriate to this type of inquiry. I felt recognised and supported by this comment and resolved to remain with the uncertainty that this openness engenders. At some level epistemological certainty would contradict the heuristic and autoethnographic path I have chosen.

"If we can simply observe without forming conclusions as to what our observations mean and allow ourselves to sit with all the seemingly unrelated bits and pieces of information we see, fresh ways to understand can eventually emerge."

Senge et al (2005:31)

In the field of heuristic research Moustakas (1990) describes a series of processes that he sees as supportive to the heuristic researcher and all of these processes have strong resonance with my own thinking. In particular the way in which the researcher becomes totally immersed in the question, trusting that tacit knowing and intuition will lead to a deeper understanding of the meaning of their experience.

The process of tacit knowing is about the understanding that:

"We can know more than we can tell ... We know a persons face and can recognise it among a thousand, indeed among a million. Yet we usually cannot tell how we recognise a face we know ... this knowledge cannot be put into words."

Polanyi (1983: 4)

A further process, embedded in the theory and practice of heuristic research, is intuition and I suggest that we should not underestimate the usefulness of this type of knowing:

“ ... there can be intuitive knowledge, or awareness, which is just as valid and reliable, is generally not recognised ... ”

Capra (1982: 22)

Maybe this is because it is a way of knowing that lacks the usual corollary of knowing how we know. However such knowing may be beyond ordinary comprehension in that:

“Intuition is really a sudden immersion of the soul into the universal current of life.”

Coelho (1993: 77)

This immersion can be thought of as the capacity to make inferences and perhaps a bridge between the explicit and the tacit that makes immediate knowledge possible without the intervening steps of logic and reason.

At the temporary end to my thinking, marked by the writing of my thesis, I realise that I am deeply committed to the principle of learning from experience in the sense that this is the bedrock for all other learning. I am encouraged in this respect by key thinkers and authors whose work has directly or indirectly influenced my own development. For example Maslow emphasised that:

“... there is no substitute for experience, none at all. All the other paraphernalia of communication and of knowledge – words, labels, concepts, symbols, theories, formulas, sciences – all are useful only because people already know them experientially.”

Maslow (1966: 45)

The root of knowledge can in this way be traced back to experience and it is only with the passage of time that such knowledge is espoused as law, policy and best practice. It seems that within the sea of experience in which we are constantly immersed some things stand out and prompt us to share what we have noticed with others, in conversation, through presenting ideas in writing or through other forms of communication. A theory may emerge from such sharing and we proceed to test out that theory in practice. This brings new ideas to the next level of experience and the cycle continues.

This position echoes the work of John Heron who articulates a coherent and comprehensive model of holistic knowing that is based on four key learning levels:

“ ... propositional knowing, expressed in statements that something is the case, is interdependent with three other kinds of knowing: practical knowing or knowing how to exercise a skill; presentational knowing an intuitive grasp of the significance of patterns as expressed in graphic, plastic, moving, musical and verbal art forms; and experiential knowing, imaging and feeling the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process or thing ... ”

Heron (1996: 52)

I frequently use a hybrid of Heron's well-constructed model, overlaid with my own simplified version, as a tool for facilitation. I encourage groups to remember that the policy change under consideration is actually based on the work of their predecessors in the field. A grumble that is often heard relates to the way that the shiny new policy is remarkably similar to current good practice. I believe that this enshrinement in orthodox practice can be seen as an endorsement of the way that the group currently operates. The task in the facilitated session in these circumstances may be to ensure that this claim is true and to mainstream the new policy across the service in question.

In the context of this evolutionary view of knowledge I become frustrated when people adopt a position of certainty from which they appear unable or unwilling to have dialogue about other possibilities. Human history is littered with realisations that previously held certainty is in fact incomplete or misguided. It is as if such a way of thinking not only limits the thinker but also those around them as they seek to impose the meaning that they claim to be factual. It has been my experience that the loudest and most certain voice exerts pressure for a decision to be made that turns out to be premature and is reversed at a later date.

Human inquiry may benefit from much more sharing of experience. My own knowing, based on reflection, is shared quite tentatively. This is what I know now as a result of a prolonged period of reflective inquiry. For my knowledge to arrive in a wider world it must resonate with enough people, particularly

facilitators. I have been encouraged by the nodding heads to proceed to this stage.

Reflexivity

There is one other aspect of my epistemological position that merits a mention, that of reflexivity. This topic could be a thesis in its own right and I can barely do it justice within this sub-section. Reflexivity is however crucial to my thesis, and to the way I generally work, and is a term that refers to the way that:

“The qualitative analyst owns and is reflective about her or his own voice and perspective; a credible voice conveys authenticity and trustworthiness; complete objectivity being impossible and pure subjectivity undermining credibility, the researcher’s focus becomes balance – understanding and depicting the world authentically in all its complexity while being self-analytical, politically aware, and reflexive in consciousness.”

Patton (2002: 495)

This seems to me to be intrinsic to the style of the autoethnographer and it may be the degree to which I have managed to be reflexive, to go beyond mere reflection, that my narrative is judged to be convincing and useful. This entails demonstrating the development of my thinking and the reasons for statements of meaning that I express. By showing my biases I may in turn allow the work to be more easily judged and this may show the plot emerging below the surface of the narrative:

“ ... doing reflexivity should mean more than being clever or dispassionate – it should facilitate greater insights into personal or social experience.”

Finlay and Gough (2003:1)

I cannot say that I have provided greater insights but can claim that this has been my intention. There is a level of intimacy that has been ever present in my research approach that reminds me of an old colleague who described this as ‘into-me-you-see’. In this respect I concur with the following:

“The reflexive researcher is ... committed to unravelling and making explicit the interpretation of interpretation, and the critical gaze is

turned towards the self and the constituting of the research which is transparently deconstructed ... the researcher will be reporting the research as in process – as an act of personal discovery in which journalising or keeping a research diary helps to situate the researcher in the research process. However this is not a simple descriptive activity, but requires analytical skills, which are a part of any interpretative research endeavour. Reflexive research is therefore a meta-methodology, a methodology whose object of study is itself.”

Freshwater and Rolfe (2001: 533)

In my endeavours to understand the nature of interpretation I have encountered one further technical term that needs a mention – hermeneutics – and I will explore this briefly before embarking on the section that looks more widely at the methodological landscape.

The Hermeneutic Element

From time to time in my study I have encountered the concept of hermeneutics. This term relates to interpretation of written material in a way that illuminates the message contained in such work. This concept appears to have its roots in the search to understand Biblical texts:

“Hermeneutics is concerned with the interpretation of texts. In Greek mythology Hermes was the messenger of the gods. Hermeneutics became established in the context of Scriptural interpretation: what was God’s message as mediated by often incomplete or ambiguous fragments of Biblical text?”

McLeod (2001: 21)

My intention has been to search for meaning – not from texts in the traditional sense but largely from the wealth of words that I have written throughout my inquiry. These words appear in a variety of forms, e.g. journal notes and are the backbone of my data:

I must use the data that is at or just beyond my fingertips ... seeking first within and then putting out my interpretation to seek help in finding the meaning or message.

Journal – 9/2/06

The issue of hermeneutics is not straightforward in relation to autoethnography. Is it sensible for the words that emerge from the researcher to be also ascribed meaning by that same person? In one sense the answer is affirmative in that my inquiry has been based in part on my stream of consciousness journal where the link between thought and pen is reduced and the stimulus to write has led to surprising insights. It is as if the meaning arrived on the page or in my thoughts without any effort on my part. However I must be cautious in my claim to meaning:

"Hermes was a trickster: a god of cunning and tricks. The ethnographer is no trickster. He, so he says, has no cunning and no tricks. But he shares a problem with Hermes. He must make his message convincing."

Crapanzano (1986: 52)

The messages I have gathered as my thesis go far beyond the focus of my initial inquiry: they include research in general and autoethnography in particular. I have wondered whether all research may be autoethnographic, or at least autobiographical, to some degree as it often seems to be grounded in and stimulated by an individual desire to learn more about a certain thing or situation. In the case of my own inquiry this has been an explicit desire that I have tried to balance by the aspiration to wider usefulness:

"The ... process is autobiographic, yet with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social - and perhaps universal - significance."

Moustakas (1990: 15)

This encouragement to pursue a question of interest was echoed in the work of McLeod (2001), he helpfully suggests that:

"Hermeneutics involves the appreciation that a successful interpretation is from a perspective, takes place from a position within history, requires sensitivity to the use of language, and leads to a shift (or learning) on the part of the person making the interpretation."

McLeod (2001: 22)

As an autoethnographer, this use of a particular perspective is a central component in that researcher, researched and meaning maker are all the same. In these circumstances, particular care must be taken to make any

pre-understanding explicit. I have attempted to move between my pre-understanding and my ongoing attempts to find and articulate the emergent message arising from my data. Some authors describe this as the hermeneutic circle that is used as:

“... an analytical process aimed at enhancing understanding, offers a particular emphasis in qualitative analysis, namely, relating parts to wholes, and wholes to parts.”

Patton (2002: 497)

This aspiration to relate wholes and parts is a fundamental hope for me as an autoethnographer, and repeatedly expressed in my thesis. I will be glad if the small part provided by my exploration of the experience of facilitation not only resonates with others but is also useful to their work. I have at all times focused on:

“Creating a story that portrays the qualities, meanings and essences of universally unique experiences.”

Moustakas (1990: 12)

I have had feedback on the way that I do this on several occasions through my professional life. Many people I have worked alongside have expressed appreciation for my ability to genuinely hold their concerns whilst simultaneously helping them to see a bigger picture.

I now leave behind the complexity surrounding the theory of knowing and move to the next stage of considering how I might study the world. It is at this point that I address the seemingly inevitable turf war of research, there are two broad schools of thought that are uneasy bedfellows in scholarly circles. Quantitative research seeks definitive answers to particular questions whilst qualitative research may have a broader focus in exploration and description of the nature of experience. I step onto this well trodden path at this point in my thesis.

Qualitative or Quantitative Research

There is abundant literature on the relative merits of quantitative or qualitative research that explores the differences (and similarities) between these two general genres of research. The field is wide, deep, varied and perplexing but my work is definitely situated in the qualitative world. As a starting point I recognise the notion that:

“Qualitative research is not merely quantitative research without numbers. Qualitative research has its own distinctive role to play in the creation of a knowledge base...”

McLeod, J. (2001: 1)

Quantitative research is not fully explored within this thesis although I do provide an occasional glimpse of a particular theory or method such my insights into Systematic Review (an approach that is clearly linked to quantitative research).

With regard to the way in which the field of qualitative research has developed I recommend the immense contribution that Denzin and Lincoln (2000, 2005) have made over many years in their act of bringing together, as editors, several editions of a Handbook of Qualitative Research. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) have tracked the evolution of qualitative research from the early part of last century to the beginning of this one. They express particular points of development in the landscape of qualitative research as ‘moments’, where one moment corresponds to periods of several years:

- The traditional period (first moment) from early 1900’s until World War Two, based upon an anthropological framework – power was with the researcher
- The modernist phase (second moment) – post war until 1970’s – when attempts were made to standardise qualitative research, possibly in order to compare well with quantitative
- The moment of blurred genres (third moment) – 1970 to 1986 – when the researcher began to appear in qualitative reports

- The crisis of representation – mid 1980's (the fourth moment) - poems, images, dialogues and drama were used as researchers realised that they could not directly show human experience. This led to much work on how qualitative studies were to be evaluated
- The fifth moment – towards the end of the twentieth century - involved the growth of more local and contextual theories for specific problems and particular situations

At the turn of this century these authors identified the sixth (post-experimental) and seventh (future) moments with attempts to connect research within a democratic society. They suggested that this would be:

“ ... a new age where messy, uncertain, multivoiced texts, cultural criticism and new experimental works will become more common, as will more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis and intertextual representation.”

Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 23)

In the most recent (third) edition of their Handbook of Qualitative Research these authors elaborate in the light of the passage of five years, referring to the growing literature and expanding choices of method and methodology that are now available in the field of qualitative research. In 2005 they referred to the seventh moment as, “ ... *the fractured future, which is now (2005 -)*”, whilst going on to forecast an eighth moment which:

“ ... asks that social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom and community.”

Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 2)

They suggest that this focus on social purpose, set in local contexts will be part of the next wave of development but express concern about the further future where there may be a battle between some perceived gold standard qualitative research and such local, contextual studies.

My more modest summary of qualitative research is that it is fundamentally based on the tenets that:

1. Not all that counts can be counted ... and ...
2. It is better to be vaguely right than precisely wrong.

It may be that the future of research in general and qualitative research in particular will evolve or even transmute into more sophisticated and yet simpler modes of inquiry that are yet to be imagined. I wonder if research (and the findings thereof) will ultimately be seen as a time and purpose limited discipline, whilst inquiry develops as a process that offers unlimited scope within which inquirers seek merely throw light on the tiniest fragment of knowing. I have some doubts as to whether my work and other similar pieces should be called research at all and yet I have not fully explored the deeper roots of this question. By referring to my study as an inquiry I may have sidestepped the issue although I do recognise that this may be simply a semantic argument. I will return to this issue in the later section on judgement criteria.

My inquiry proceeds in the context that current researchers must thrash around in the language and forms of past research, always trying to discern and signpost something they can barely see for themselves yet trusting that something will emerge that is worth the effort. Qualitative researchers may even be close to their academic predecessors who developed the early language of research in order to describe and explain their observations and discoveries:

“Implicit in any form of qualitative inquiry is the realisation that, ultimately, we can never completely know how the world is constructed ... The best we can do perhaps is to make a temporary ‘clearing’ within which some things may be better understood, at least for a while. After a while ... this fresh understanding ... becomes assimilated into every day commonsense ways of thinking.”

McLeod, J. (2001: 4)

Given that my aim is to produce a piece of work that will also help my peers to find meaning in relation to their own facilitation I am challenged to ensure that my description is both accurate and useful. This point acknowledges the question of how my thesis can be judged, especially in research terms.

My inquiry explores the phenomenon of facilitator presence in a way that translates the meaning gathered onto the pages of my thesis where I seek to:

“ ... articulate essential insights into the phenomenon that can be understood, recognised and used by others. The researcher’s purpose is to provide a tangible and penetrating overview of the phenomenon that evokes the readers life experience of it.”

Becker (1992: 31)

I provide a brief overview of phenomenology later in this section, as part of the explanation of the way that I made my methodological choice. I now explore the field of qualitative research in a little more depth.

The Qualitative Field

As a way of investigating this field I considered the origin and found that qualitative research seems to have emerged as a reaction to the perceived limits of traditional, positivist research that sought to reduce matters of research to a point where they can be proved or disproved.

“The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency.”

Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 11)

This general point matches my inquiry in that it was never likely that I was going to count the number of times I had experienced distress as a facilitator, or measure my autonomic responses such as pulse rate or sweat rating. I am aware of other researchers who have done precisely these things but I have not pursued this line of inquiry, preferring the type of holistic approach intimated by Gregory (2005):

“It is part of the human need to break up wholes for analysis and understanding, our need to feel in control of our world that forces us to split our realities, it is not in the nature of the universe to do this.”

According to J. Gregory (personal communication, December, 2005)

Notwithstanding my intention to take a holistic approach it would seem that the breadth of possibilities available within the qualitative field is increasing, and potentially disconcerting:

“Those coming new to qualitative inquiry are understandably confused and even discombobulated by the diverse terminology and contested practices they encounter.”

Patton (2002: 76)

I therefore needed to decide where my own inquiry could be situated in the wider field.

Location in the Qualitative Field

Having decided that I orientate my work toward the qualitative, the more complex decision making process occurred whilst assessing where I should locate my work within the field of qualitative research:

“In order to construct a coherent framework, it is crucial to be aware of the philosophical, theoretical and methodological differences and similarities among the approaches. Obviously this requires an overview of the field.”

Phillips, L. and Jorgenson, M.W. (2002: 4)

I cannot claim to have proactively constructed a framework but I have worked very hard to create the space for such a structure to emerge. Workshops, supervision and discussions at the University, individual study through reading and professional discussions all supported me as I examined seemingly endless possibilities.

My academic supervision was an excellent forum in which to clarify my thinking. The early struggle of student researchers to settle on an approach to their research and consequential methodological choice was seen as an ordinary part of the process. My supervisors encouraged me to take time to fully consider the range of qualitative methodologies, which may ultimately underpin my work. My inability to make a clear choice at the outset was viewed positively, and this in turn encouraged me to broaden my view.

At some point in this exploratory process I became aware of the term 'method slurring', see for example Holloway and Wheeler, (2002: 19). This is a term that is used to describe the way in which researchers combine a variety of

approaches without fully considering or understanding their origins or underpinning assumptions.

This was an important insight that became a cautionary note as I proceeded. My exploration took me on a journey of discovery and appreciation of a wide range of methodologies and I noted broad definitions that provided a coherent framework within which I could select my own approach in a more logical and focused manner. There are several broad 'families' of methodologies that can be sketched thus:

“ ... grounded theory and phenomenology focus, for the most part, on the meanings through which people construct their realities. Ethnography has a particular concern with the way that worlds are constructed through action such as ritual and social practices. Discourse, conversational and narrative analysis are mainly designed as ways of making sense of how reality is constructed through talk and language use. Hermeneutic research seeks to uncover historical and cultural horizons of meaning through which the world is experienced.”

McLeod (2001: 4)

McLeod (2001) goes on to suggest that the choice of research path that is likely to be most productive can be made in a developmental context, depending on the maturity of knowledge regarding the particular issue being studied. He comments on the need for descriptive research in the early days of a discipline and a stronger focus on reliability and repeatability when there is an established and accepted description in the field of inquiry. I considered many of the methodologies categorised in this way before settling on a hybrid model that combined one key approach with several supportive and related methodologies.

I considered and rejected autoethnography at an early stage, a decision I later reversed. This rejection was influenced by several factors, in particular the limitation of my knowledge of the entire field of qualitative research. I could see that autoethnography was a new discipline and would therefore (in McLeod's terms) necessitate some description that I was at that time unable to address. I was also mindful that the gold standard is seen by some to be the quantitative method of the randomised controlled trial. From this

perspective qualitative research can be dismissed as no more than a potentially interesting narrative. This negation of qualitative research is not new to me but what I found more surprising was that within the qualitative world it seemed that there was also lesser and better. For example I detected a distinct impression that autoethnography was seen as a lesser research discipline whilst phenomenology was regarded more highly.

A whole vista of possibilities gradually opened up and there were many choices that I could have reasonably taken. For example I was very tempted to take refuge in bricolage, one of the many alternative concepts and approaches that stimulated my interest.

Research as Bricolage

In the context of my uncertainty and the turn I had taken away from autoethnography, deciding not to decide was an attractive proposition. I found one way forward that seemed to offer a refuge, especially as it was a relatively established methodological hybrid, in the sense that there was literature available to support my thinking. This approach, bricolage, suggests that:

"The researcher becomes a 'bricoleur' ... learning how to borrow from many different discipline ... the interpretive bricoleur produces a bricolage - that is a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation ... The choices as to which interpretive practices to employ are not necessarily set out in advance."

Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 3-4)

That there was an approach that could broker a solution from an eclectic mix of methodologies was like manna to me and seemed to make indecision into a virtue. I note my strong sense, betrayed in my tongue in cheek summary of bricolage, that this was in some way enabling me to avoid making a clear choice, hence my use of the term 'refuge'. Nonetheless, I felt that this was worth a closer look and recalled a poster I once had on my office wall that reassuringly gave the advice for use in times of uncertainty – 'to be sure of hitting the target, shoot first, and then, whatever you hit, call that the target'.

My work has this sort of retrospective sense making but the sentiment expressed in this pithy quote did not give me an acceptable way forward for my claim to research. Ongoing indecision was equally unacceptable and I moved on fairly quickly from bricolage, as it did not satisfy my desire to find a coherent methodological base.

As I was in the process of writing my thesis it occurred to me that my eventual use of a mixed methodology might indeed be regarded as bricolage. Despite this apparent u-turn I note a sense of confidence that my inquiry remains essentially autoethnographic and it is with this in mind that I explore the use of narrative as a way to conduct research.

About Narrative Research

Use of narrative became a fundamental component of my inquiry at about the mid-way point of the doctorate although my journal entries at the time suggest that my early thoughts on the subject indicate mixed feelings:

Narrative! Even this word seems to academicize. I just want to tell my story.

Why do I want to tell my story? What is my story? What is a story? What story is it I want to tell? How will I know that this is the story to tell? Will I tell the right story or the wrong story?

Journal - 13/1/05

It has been typical of my efforts to clarify matters by identifying the parameters of a research term to find only confusion and disagreement. As ever there were more questions than answers and I discovered that the word narrative seems to be interchangeable with the term story:

"Narrative research ... refers to any study that uses or analyses narrative materials. The data can be collected as a story (a life story provided in an interview or a literary work) or in a different manner (field notes of an anthropologist who writes up his or her observations as a narrative or in personal letters)."

Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R. and Zilber, T. (1998: 2)

A story well told can be fundamentally useful in the accurate dissemination of findings but a story is necessarily partial, historical and transitory. Use of narrative may therefore demand much more of both the researcher/writer and the reader. I detect an increased need for those seeking to use such narratives within research to be robust in their ability to explain or even defend this use. The researcher/author must make any claim to accuracy inferred in the story convincing and explicit. There is a parallel demand on the reader to use a discerning eye, watching carefully for possible false claims or particular omissions and considering whether the account, ultimately, rings true.

I am encouraged by my sense of the way that narrative researchers have observed that, particularly within the context of human research, there are rarely universally provable points:

“When we aggregate people, treating diversity as error variance, in search of what is common to all, we often learn about what is true of no one in particular. Narrative approaches allow us to witness the individual in her or his complexity and recognise that although some of the phenomena will be common to all, some will remain unique.”

Josselson, R. (1995: 32)

My own thesis is an account based on the accumulation of field notes from within myself and from the work of others who have gone before me. My story is presented here as a thesis and I particularly resonate with the way that Greenhalgh and Hurwitz (1998) explain the use of story:

“You could make an objective list of the actions you performed last week, but if it were simply a ‘factual’ account, it would not mean anything. But if you told us what you had done in the last week, not only would your story acquire meaning, but in telling it, both you the narrator and we the listeners would be compelled to reflect on it in order to gain a greater understanding of what had gone on.”

Greenhalgh and Hurwitz (1998: 4)

These authors articulate the urge to use narrative and are inspirational to my own thinking. The use of the story of one, or more, person(s) as an anchor, from which it may be possible to have an impact on others, is of deep importance in my work. My tentative proposition at the outset of my inquiry was that recounting my own experience of facilitation might induce (in myself

and others) reflection, learning and ultimately enhanced ability to facilitate. My whole thesis is based on this proposition.

My narrative is not to be seen as truth per se as it is a particular story from a particular time in the context of my ever-moving life. When we analyse any narrative we may be looking at a diary entry in which reality itself changed the moment after the entry was made. Commonly available life stories such as autobiographies or biographies are not complete but there is a trust, or not, that the authors have authentically represented the life story of the subject. The reader may be able to engage with the story, identifying with similarities and noting differences between themselves and the subject.

In a research context the reader of narrative is similarly encouraged to get involved, there is no spoon-feeding of knowledge through a litany of facts and figures, in contrast:

“The authors privilege stories over analysis ... They ask their readers to feel the truth of their stories and to become co-participants, engaging the storyline ... ”

Ellis and Bochner (2000: 745)

I particularly hope that readers will become involved with my writing as it develops within, and beyond, the academic boundary of the doctorate. One author expresses the tension between merely telling the story and the research requirement for developing understanding:

“Narratives facilitate the search for, and construction of, new meanings in situations where the old meanings no longer work. They do not, however, mirror past events in a straightforward way ... we live our lives forward but understand them backwards, our narrative understandings are not fixed in stone. ”

Skultans (1998: 232)

Such lack of certainty, when set in the context of research, is provocative to critics. My previously noted response to professional opposition, especially my decision to move away from autoethnography as a way of avoiding the consequent challenge, is echoed here:

“The question that I’m usually asked is, ‘To what kind of truth do these stories aspire?’ Often this question is asked in a tone that expresses scepticism, doubt, and even hostility.”

Ellis and Bochner: (2000: 745)

It can be easier to turn away than face the criticism, especially when much time and effort goes into such work.

Evaluating Narrative Research

Although my thesis is based on my lived reality this does not mean that it can therefore be claimed or assumed to be true for others. Once again the reader’s perspective is of great significance. It is the reader who will judge the degree of truth and any relevance to their wider world, a theme to which I return in a later section on how this type of work could be judged. For now I offer a glimpse of the way in which others have grappled with this issue in relation to narrative in particular:

“In narrative research, trustworthiness and authenticity seem very appropriate. These mean that the researcher remains faithful to the meaning and experience of the participants ... “

Holloway and Freshwater (2007: 116)

These comments are made in the context of studies of others, but what if the subject of the study is the self of the researcher, as is the case with my own inquiry? In the case of autoethnography, for example, the researcher and the research are intertwined and so the story is written both about and by the researcher, and with attention to the potential impact of telling the story:

“So the question is not ‘does my story reflect my past accurately?’ ... as if holding a mirror to my past. Rather I must ask, ‘What are the consequences my story produces? What kind of a person does it shape me into? What new possibilities does it introduce for living my life?’ The crucial issues are what narratives do, what consequences they have, to what use can they be put?”

Ellis and Bochner (2000: 746)

I regard this thesis as a story with a purpose and my aspiration in writing autoethnographically is that this telling will make a difference, to myself and to readers. As Todres (2007) asks:

“What kind of qualitative descriptions of human experience produce a feeling of understanding in the reader?”

Todres (2007: 5)

This thesis offers one description, based on consistent, lengthy and sincere inquiry into my experience as a facilitator and in the hope that the feelings of readers' will be elicited. If this is to be seen as research then further thought is necessary when one makes such claims of a narrative account:

... narrative research does not require replicability of results as a criterion for its evaluation. Thus readers need to rely more on the personal wisdom, skills and integrity of the researcher. Yet interpretation does not mean absolute freedom for speculation and intuition ... Interpretive decisions ... require justification.”

Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R. and Zilber, T. (1998: 10)

These authors indicate the need to justify scholarly work in research terms and one emergent criterion by which one may judge narrative to be identifiable as research is that the text explicitly incorporates a search for meaning. The bar may be set somewhat higher for narrative research, for example an aspiration for transformation is no easy option:

“Do you sense a passage through emotional epiphany to some communicated truth, not resolution per se, but some transformation from an old self to a new one ... Does the story enable you to understand and feel the experience it seeks to convey?”

Ellis and Bochner (2000: 749)

For now I will leave this question and delve a little further into the complicating factor of the personal involvement of the researcher.

Use of Self

My journey through the methodological maze has included my pursuit of the ability to state, as clearly as possible, where I stand on the issue of use of self. This element is intrinsic to my methodological choices and to my work in general. Some research approaches simply dismiss the possibility of using self whilst other approaches use a variety of ways to identify, disarm or sideline the person of the researcher and any impact that they may have. Others still embrace and utilise self as the cornerstone of the research.

Despite my attempts to cloak myself in words of many syllables attempting to eliminate or bracket part of my self seemed to be artificial, impossible and inadvisable in the context of my inquiry.

The importance of taking into account my own experience. Not attempting the impossible, bracketing,, but gradually filtering and moving towards a position where I can say where I stand.

Journal – 1/11/05

Of course there is no question that a writer is allowed to use self. Who is there to prevent this? But use of self within research is contentious, with strong views at both extremes of the discussion. Reading about the relative merits created an interfering noise from which I felt the need to retreat. I needed to find a way of working this question out to some degree for myself, notwithstanding the many subtle influences on my world brought about by prior reading, learning and the zeitgeist into I which I was born and now live and work. As I progressed so I grappled with the question of locating exactly where *I* was in relation to the research. It became increasingly apparent that I was observer and observed, practitioner and researcher.

I was supported by the work of Jan Reed (1995) and her notion of practitioner research. She suggested an alternative view that influenced the next shift in my thinking by referring to a kind of knowing that can be elicited because of who I am. She elaborated thus:

“One of the biggest issues facing practitioner researchers is the way in which their practitioner knowledge and identity affects the collection of data ... it is knowledge that cannot be easily discarded – although attempts can be made to do so, the success of such attempts is debatable ... the issue is not whether the researcher knows something about the topic to be studied but whether they know what they know.”

Reed (1995: 47)

I began to think of myself as a practitioner/researcher and my return path to autoethnography was marked by my acceptance that use of self within my own inquiry was imperative and I therefore needed to find an enabling

research framework. In the field of autoethnography and similarly oriented methodologies dialogue on whether one can use self, becomes irrelevant in the certainty that one will, and even should, do so:

“By not insisting on some sort of personal accountability our academic publications reinforce the third-person, passive voice as the standard, which gives more weight to abstract and categorical knowledge than to the direct testimony of personal narrative and the first-person voice. It doesn’t even occur to most authors that writing in the first person is an option.”

Ellis and Bochner (2000: 734).

Ellis in particular reinforces the importance of the person of the researcher using a description of an interview between herself and a potential student. She notes how she confronted this student with the certainty that her own experience would impact on the research she proposed:

*“Student: ‘I’ve had breast cancer ... but I won’t let that bias my research. You can count on that.’
Ellis: ‘Of course you will’.”*

Ellis and Bochner (2000: 736)

Ellis then followed this very direct counter to her student’s insistence that her experience would not affect her research by offering reassurance to this person that her experience would not only be present but would also be valid and useful. This seems to be a marked departure from a traditional view of what is and is not research along with an insistence on the absolute primacy of the experience of the researcher.

The spirit and practice of autoethnography has this issue at the heart of its claim to be research but before committing to this methodology I still needed to explore alternative and related fields more thoroughly. I took a long detour into the field of phenomenology. As an aspiring phenomenologist I was particularly keen influenced to consider the idea of pre-understandings and the degree to which my own experience and knowledge would either influence or bias my ongoing work, or whether I could successfully set these aside:

“Rather than trying to eliminate preunderstandings the phenomenologist becomes aware of them so that they can be set aside

... Phenomenologists call this process 'bracketing' or suspending preunderstandings of the phenomenon."

Becker (1992: 37)

I explore this and other related concepts in the following section.

The Phenomenological Thread

As a result of my rather defensive methodological manoeuvres, from an approach that clearly used self, my early attempts were more conservative than later efforts and my shift toward phenomenology was mostly an attempt to find a conventional way forward. When I first met the term phenomenology I could barely pronounce it and I noted my early lack of understanding of phenomenology in my journal. One entry, part poetic and part prose appears below:

I don't know the word – phenomenology

I hear the word

I try to say the word. I can't quite manage

I practice.

I manage

I look for definitions. I am spoiled for choice.

I look more closely. I realise there is disagreement.

I settle on a "clear, concise perspective on where it has been and where it ought to be heading"

I do not find it to be clear or concise

I look again.

I find Giorgi (1985). I think I begin to understand some of the words. I get a grasp of the argument. I see the different ways of transcribing meaning units.

I see the potential for researcher bias. I am not confused. Merely perplexed.

Thank God for Carol S. Becker

Living and Relating: An Introduction to Phenomenology

This is what it says it is

Journal - 24/11/04

Fortunately the knowledge base regarding phenomenology was high within group supervision sessions with strong contributions to my learning coming

from staff and peers within the group. I was captivated by the ongoing discussions and wondered how I had made it through so much of my education to date with so little knowledge of this rich tradition of thinking especially given the way it seemed to underpin so much of qualitative research.

From the wealth of possible leads emanating from the discussion I searched further and found that the following definition of phenomenology helped:

“Phenomenology is the study of phenomena, of things or events, in the everyday world. Phenomenologists study situations in the everyday world from the perspective of the experiencing person. Investigating the meanings these events have to people.”

Becker (1992: 7)

Phenomenology gradually became an attractive way forward as autoethnography was relegated to become an interesting mental detour. The linked concepts of stream of consciousness, lifeworld, descriptive approach and ‘whatness’ gave me much food for thought and great encouragement to proceed. I considered facilitation more deeply in the light of these concepts, and in particular I focused on the phenomenon of distress free authority:

“Phenomenology asks for the very nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a some-‘thing’ what it is and without which it could not be what it is.”

van Manen (1990: 10)

On a theoretical level I recall that one session of group supervision in particular was very instructive to me and I recall some of the key points elicited from the discussion as an edited journal note, using the names of key phenomenologists as headings:

Edmund Husserl

Husserl was concerned about over explanation or interpretation – believing that once you do that then all you find is confirmation of the explanation of an assumption. He was therefore more focused on description and epistemology – to find a foundation for knowing. He asked - how can we know and what is evidence? Husserl was also influential in suggesting bracketing. This means

the researcher deciding to 'leave aside for now' some part of their thinking such as assumptions that they consciously make. This is controversial because there is disagreement as to the degree to which this is possible. Whilst some say that freedom from the known is possible, others disagree. In practice bracketing is seen as a useful way to allow meanings to come to you. This is not an absolute but enough to allow new discoveries to occur

Martin Heidegger

Heidegger was more interested in ontology – what is being, what kind of beings are we that we can know? He also offered the idea of sensitising in the context of Hermeneutic Phenomenology. The German word 'dasein' was used by Heidegger and frequently referred to by others, and is about being in the world and infers that we can never get outside our experience. We are so connected that we cannot separate ourselves from our context, our history. Hermeneutics is therefore said to be about sensitising, which means that one reflects on where one is embedded in the world. This does not just entail a personal inquiry but requires just enough to enable you to move forward awarely and sensitively. Indeed the point of moving back is in order to move forward.

Hans-Georg Gadamer

Gadamer, a student of Heidegger, thought that understanding is a play between our past (what we know, prejudices) and how we meet the future. He proposes that understanding is always on the way, always conversational. He also describes catalytic validity, where the researcher does not know what understanding will be catalysed in the reader

Edited journal notes

Bracketing, sensitising, aware and explicit juggling of past prejudices and future expectations – all seemed to be valid ways of managing self and I found that these whetted my appetite to look more deeply at this crucial issue. I read around the subject of phenomenology for some time longer, noting for example that:

“Our beginning understandings about an area of interest are intimately informed by significance's of which we are part ... What initially motivates our enquiries is thus part of this natural world of everyday engagements and contexts in which we participate.”

Todres and Holloway (2004: 84)

My focus and motivation originated in my experience of facilitator distress and eventually evolved towards my engagement with the notion of presence of the

facilitator. In particular I was intent on exploring my experience as a facilitator and discovering what it is about presence that makes it a distinct phenomenon. I particularly wanted to learn how to be most present in my work. Les Todres and Immy Holloway, support this aspiration and suggest that some things demand further inquiry. Their work seemed to extend an invitation to me stating:

“This is what a phenomenon is, something that stands out from the lifeworld and appears (asks for attention).”

Todres and Holloway (2004: 81)

My attention had certainly been attracted by something that was already a part of my life, i.e. my experience of the criteria of excellence in facilitation espoused by Heron (1989), and in particular his phrase *“distress free authority”* that remains very pertinent to me in my professional lifeworld:

“A research project usually begins in a lifeworld. The topic is salient, either in a positive or negative way for the researcher. Personal interest sparks a desire to discover how other people experience the phenomenon. In general phenomenological researchers want to know more about what a phenomenon is rather than what causes it to exist.”

Becker (1992: 33)

Whilst a phenomenological thread was emerging as a clear underpinning influence to my research I also realised that I could not make much progress before I hit the challenges involved in gathering my own description. I had learned that:

“The phenomenologically orientated researcher asks the experts of these life events, the people doing and experiencing them, to describe experiences ... then the researcher discerns the experiential components and the important aspects of the phenomenon.”

Becker (1992: 8)

Here was a potential dilemma as I am the apparent expert in this instance and therefore the only one who can describe my own experiences. It is of course possible for others to describe my behaviour and to interpret or explain this behaviour in a variety of ways. However this commentary would be largely limited to interpretations, assumptions or inferences about my experience.

In the light of this complication I needed to consider other methodologies and distinguish between a phenomenological study per se and the phenomenological perspective that I was beginning to articulate:

“One can employ a general phenomenological perspective to elucidate the importance of using methods that capture people’s experience of the world without conducting a phenomenological study that focuses on the essence of shared experience.”

Patton (2002: 107)

My return to autoethnography was signposted in my thinking at this time. It was gradually dawning on me, through the process of considering phenomenology (and other methodologies) that I was attending to **my own experience** of presence as a facilitator (a major part of my lifeworld), and this should be honoured as the root of my research – hence autoethnography.

Although I was using methods derived from phenomenology it became increasingly apparent that this particular methodology was not the key to my study. I wanted to include methods that would elicit appropriate data, analyse this in a meaningful way and then represent the meaning extracted within the context of my experience of real (to me) life. This was the essential factor in the move I made back to autoethnography. I was not studying something ‘out there’ in a random group of facilitators but ‘in here’ as part of my lived experience.

I observed that within my gradual move to placing the term presence at the centre of my inquiry there was a methodological issue to address:

“There is one final dimension that differentiates a phenomenological approach: the assumption that there is an essence or essences to a shared experience. These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced.”

Patton 2002: 106)

I hoped that by fully describing the essence of how I am most, or least, present as a facilitator I would elicit meaning for myself that ultimately may be shared with and useful to my community of peers. I was focused in my task of discovering what is essential about facilitation that would enable me to be

more present and then most present. I recognised that the distinction between more and most might ensure that I did not chase a holy grail of perfection.

The Re-emergence of Autoethnography as my Central Approach

The limitation of phenomenology regarding use of self became clearer as I progressed in my studies and a return to autoethnography became more attractive in the light of a definite commitment to using my own experience as an intrinsic element of the research inquiry I was undertaking. This realisation coincided with my attendance at an event hosted by Bournemouth University entitled 'Master The way we present ourselves may vary according to the context we are in. For example I find it relatively easy to locate and sustain my presence with individuals and increasingly difficult as groups get bigger. Class: Autoethnography: The Deviant Methodology, an event that featured presentations from two autoethnographers on their work. Both had based their research on personal and emotionally difficult life experiences. There was much time for discussion, between presenters and group as part of the formalities of the day, and between participants in the breaks.

One of the presenters passionately stated that the story of an individual should be respected and afforded a due place at the table of academia:

“Autoethnography celebrates rather than demonizes the individual story ... By the time I arrive at the point in my journey where I have to consider if my story is deviant just because no authority voice is telling it, I am left with a puzzle. Perhaps there are no deviant cases; perhaps there are just lots more individual stories waiting to be told, stories that are sometimes difficult to tell, that need support and understanding in the telling.”

Muncey (2005: 7)

I agree with Muncey in that I have found no autoethnography that is like mine. Indeed if I were to write it again I would do so differently. Some of the gaps that I note as unturned stones might be filled if I were to produce a further iteration, whilst others would remain and more may emerge. Despite these apparent limitations I do not see my experience as a deviant case!

I did however begin with a range of strong reactions to this methodology in that I was intrigued and challenged, impressed and sceptical in response to this Masterclass. In my journal that day I noted several reasons for and against a decision to focus on autoethnography:

*“Against – angst ridden, therapeutic, indulgent and irrelevant
For – brave, decisive, committed and serious”*

Journal 24/02/06

I decided to proceed and my inquiry has been a committed and serious exploration of my life work. As I made my methodological choice I recognised the need to defend my eventual thesis and took this challenge anticipating some academic opposition:

So, in relation to autoethnography ... This is my choice. It is a definite choice ... I am choosing it decisively, in a reasonably informed way and with a sense of courage. The dominant discourse, even in qualitative research, does not yet embrace autoethnography...

Journal 24/02/06

Autoethnography

My anxiety about this approach has been somewhat reduced by the optimistic stance that:

“Autoethnography is an intriguing and promising qualitative method that offers a way of giving voice to personal experience for the purpose of extending sociological understanding.”

Wall (2008: 38)

In this section I summarise the field of autoethnography and make the distinction with ethnography clear. I then identify a range of approaches that could be claimed as autoethnographic before highlighting my own perspective. My thesis chiefly represents the inquiry that began at the start of my doctoral journey, whilst also drawing on my life and professional experience prior to this arbitrary starting point.

Autoethnography is an intensely introspective approach and this document is the external manifestation of a prolonged period of introspection. The principle of looking within is at the heart of the autoethnographic approach:

"The Question

Said the monk, 'All these mountains and rivers and the earth and the stars, where do they come from?'

Said the master, 'Where does your question come from? Search within!'"

De Mello (1984: 28)

My commitment to the autoethnographic approach to searching within provided the stable base from which I could give further consideration to other influential methodologies. Extending my academic inquiry in this way led me to explore how the term 'autoethnography' is theoretically and etymologically a derivative of ethnography. I feel that it is important both to honour these links and to clarify the distinctions. The potential for confusion is high, indeed one author calls autoethnography:

" ... the 'new ethnography' ... 'creative narratives shaped out of the writer's personal experiences within a culture.'

Goodall (2000: 9)

Patton (2002) picks up the cultural thread, further emphasising the link with ethnography by asserting that:

"In autoethnography ... you use your own experiences to garner insights into the larger culture or subculture of which you are a part."

Patton (2002: 86)

Placing a specific emphasis on ones own culture neatly bridges the gap between ethnography and autoethnography as the duty of the autoethnographer is to focus on personal experience and, as Baldwin (1990) emphatically notes, the rigour that the researcher must employ in the light of this task is somewhat demanding:

“One writes of one thing only – one’s own experience. Everything depends on how relentlessly one forces from this experience the last drop, sweet or bitter, it can possibly give.”

Baldwin (1990: Introduction)

A further echo with ethnography is that autoethnography can be both method and outcome. This blurring of boundaries is both freeing and difficult since it may lead to methodology and method being entangled. The researcher must find a balance between writing **about** autoethnography and writing **an** autoethnography and I am firmly in agreement with the view that:

“ ... autoethnography does not merely require us to explore the interface between culture and self; it requires us to write about ourselves.”

Etherington (2004: 140)

My work is consequently interspersed with extracts from my personal journal as a way of meeting this requirement.

Definitions

I am indebted to the work of Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997), an anthropologist who edited a collection of essays on the subject of autoethnography. She provides a brief history of autoethnography and gives passing mention to earlier authors before going on to discuss the work of David Hayano, published in 1979, who strongly suggests that autoethnographers:

“ ... possess the qualities of often permanent self-identification with a group and full internal membership, as recognised both by themselves and the people of whom they are a part.”

Hayano (1979: 100)

I have found that there are many different meanings ascribed to the term autoethnography that:

“ ... makes precise definition difficult. It seems appropriate now to include under a broad rubric of autoethnography those studies that have been referred to by other similarly situated terms ... ”

Ellis and Bochner (2000: 739)

As the field has developed many writers have suggested definitions that range from simple to sophisticated. There are narrative approaches of various types, several variations on a theme that honours the shared roots with ethnography and a whole host of convoluted hybrid terms that attempt to sharpen and specify particular approaches that researchers have taken.

Laurel Richardson is quite straightforward in the way that she refers to writing itself as:

"A method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and the topic."
Richardson, L. (2000: 923)

This simple approach reminds me that whatever the variation autoethnography directly, openly and unambiguously makes use of the self of the researcher a central component of the research. This simplicity is echoed and expanded by other writers:

"Autoethnography operates within the interstices – and blurs the boundaries – between individual reflexivity (auto-), the transcription of collective human experience (-ethno) and writing as a form of inquiry (-graphy) that does not merely 'write up' the research but is itself the 'method of discovery'."

Denzin et al (2006: 427)

Chaim Noy elaborates on these points, suggesting that autoethnography:

" ... is a genre that suggests innovatively that in some cases, writing about and through oneself, is scholarly illuminating. The writer addresses herself or himself ("auto"), as a subject of a larger social or cultural inquiry ("ethno"), vis-à-vis evocative and revealing writing ("graphy") ... The work tells of those constitutive dimensions that in ordinary, conventional scientific language are erased or play a backstage role."

Noy (2003: 2)

This is a demanding methodology in which one has to balance personal introspection (that may usually be backstage in research) and rigorous attention to the inquiry at hand. Any difficulty I have had in reducing such lived inquiry to an account that is aesthetically pleasing and scientifically reasonable has been ameliorated by my enjoyment and engagement in the struggle to do so. Being a fully participating member of the facilitator sub-

culture within which my autoethnography is based may have helped this relative ease. My membership of this community of peers could be seen as 'complete member researcher' where the autoethnographer is:

"... a more analytic and self-conscious participant ... than is the typical group member ... the autoethnographer's understanding, both as a member and as a researcher, emerge not from detached discovery but from engaged dialogue."

Anderson (2006: 382)

I am glad to be in the company of others who have gone before me and who have also tried to manage this tension.

Evocative vs. Analytic

There is a particular issue regarding flexibility and openness in autoethnography and I have been challenged by the question:

"How do I balance telling (about autoethnography's history, methods, responsibilities and possibilities) with showing (doing the work of autoethnography here in these pages)? How much of myself do I put in and leave out?"

Holman Jones (2005: 764)

I have grappled with this question in the light of the academic award for which I am presenting my work. I have sought to represent the whole of my work as autoethnographic rather than simply highlighting or emphasising emotionally dramatic and evocative experiences. This is a tricky area and I have vacillated between the need for analysis and the strength of the evocative, (based on years of experience where a real life example can have a profound impact on understanding).

Maybe autoethnographies that seek to expose meaning derived from analysis are different from those that seek to evoke a response (preferably emotional) within the reader. According to Anderson (2006) there are several key features that differentiate analytic autoethnography from evocative autoethnography and he suggests that the former relates to work in which the researcher is most likely to be:

“ ... (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member ... and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena.”

Anderson (2006: 375)

This approach can be compared and contrasted with the work of autoethnographer's who write evocatively, and may prefer to:

“ ... bypass the representational problem by invoking the epistemology of emotion, moving the reader to feel the feelings of another ... ”

Denzin (1997: 228)

I noticed that as I progressed in writing up the final thesis I had a tendency to abandon previous draft material that alluded to, or more frankly described, the emotional impact I experience from time to time in my work. I revisited this aspect of my work following the viva voce examination during which I was encouraged to include more personal examples. My final draft reintroduces moments of angst and pleasure chiefly through the medium of my journal notes that are now more liberally integrated into my whole thesis and the final result consequently has a more even balance between telling and showing.

Whatever the apparent gap between evocative and analytic autoethnography it seems to me that all autoethnographers need to pay some attention to analysis to show that their stories are based on authentic experiential data. Ellis suggests one way to capture this personal experience in the way that she refers her student to a systematic approach:

“I start with my personal life, I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts and emotions. I use what I call systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall to try to understand an experience I've lived through. Then I write my experience as a story.”

Ellis and Bochner (2000: 737)

This strategy may offer a bridge between the two broad approaches.

The Continuums of Autoethnography

Beyond the evocative/analytic debate there are other dimensions in which to locate autoethnography in the wider field of research. I referred to the

historical developments in qualitative research earlier in my thesis, articulated as a series of points in time when a shift in emphasis and design occurred. Within recent moments my methodological choice is growing in stature:

“ ... increasingly, autoethnography has become the term of choice in describing studies and procedures that connect the personal to the cultural.”

Ellis and Bochner (2000: 740)

Further distinctions are possible within this increasing field of autoethnography and Patton reproduces an extensive list of phrases that have already emerged:

“... to support this emergent frontier of qualitative inquiry and to confuse exactly what it is ...”

Patton (2002: 85)

Rather than reproducing this list of 30 possibilities I suggest several continuums within which the autoethnographic inquirer can locate their study by asking if their study is more or less:

- Autobiographical
- About the inquirer being part of the culture in question
- Using words, rather than alternative modes of representation

Ellis and Bochner (2000) echo this way of categorising autoethnography:

“Autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethnos), and on self (auto) ... Different exemplars of autoethnography fall at different places along the continuum of each of these three axes.”

Ellis and Bochner (2000: 740)

I suggest that whatever approach the autoethnographer takes the key component is that the specific experience of the researcher, within the culture that they are inquiring into, must be honoured:

“ ... because autoethnographic research accesses a different type of lived experience than do other qualitative methods, and because it is ideally suited to explore the relationship between researchers and their fields of inquiry, it is potentially a (self-) empowering endeavour.”

Noy (2007: 355)

This supports my own decision to regard my whole inquiry as an autoethnography within which several sections are personal and several are based on a more academic genre of writing. Either way, I am the same person at the heart of the inquiry.

I now offer a more detailed exposure of the common roots autoethnography shares with ethnography. I have followed this line of inquiry in order to gain a deeper understanding of autoethnography and have found that:

“Ethnography and autoethnography might be thought of as bookends, or opposite ends of a qualitative continuum, that frame a large number of distinct qualitative approaches.”

Patton (2002: 84)

The Ethnographic Thread

The idea that ethnography and autoethnography are bookends suggests some distance between the two methodologies, as well as a connection. In the light of this ongoing confusion between difference and similarity I will conclude this section with a commentary on what I see as the key distinctions.

Ethnography is perplexing in that it refers to an approach **and** an outcome and is derived from ‘ethno’, meaning culture, and ‘graphos’ meaning written account. Indeed, it has occurred to me that ethnography can be a very imprecise approach that is not entirely helped by the dual definition. I found the following humorous depiction of entry into ethnography that mirrored my own indecision:

“First ethnographer: Where are you going to do your fieldwork?”

Second ethnographer: I don’t know yet.

First ethnographer: What are you going to study?”

Second ethnographer: That depends on where I go.”

Wolcott (1999)

Ethnography arose from anthropology and therefore shares the problem of being associated with traditionally dominant social, economic and educational power. The early anthropologists tended to be white, male and educated and gravitated to study other cultures that they considered primitive. Any

prejudices and assumptions inherent in their work was not confronted in the early days, but drew critical comment from later writers:

“In the beginning ... anthropologists explored only ‘primitive’ cultures (a term that demonstrates the patronising stance of many early anthropologists).”

Holloway and Wheeler (2002: 136)

This thesis does not explore the issues surrounding the early development of ethnography, as this would be an inappropriate tangent for my study, consulting a standard text on the subject would be more informative. Instead I focus on the presence or absence of the ethnographer (researcher), in the light of my own commitment to autoethnography.

Within early studies it appeared that:

“The anthropologist was present in the field but appears to be absent in the text.”

Skultans (1998: 226)

Ethnographers are expected to explicate and differentiate between the thoughts of the participants themselves and the theoretical perspective of their study. This partnership approach is known as “the emic-etic dimension” where emic is about “*the reality and definition of the informants*” and etic refers to the “*ideas of the ethnographers*” (Holloway and Wheeler, 2002). Maybe this distinction is irrelevant in autoethnographies, since the informant and the autoethnographer are the same person.

Some writers seem enmeshed in the confusion between self as inquirer and self that is somehow set apart from the inquiry. For example, at several points in my thesis I allude to my autoethnographic field notes (journal entries). Although ethnographic and autoethnographic methods are similar the source of the notes is, at face value, quite distinct. However it is entirely possible that the field notes of the ethnographer can be as personal as the field notes of the autoethnographer.

I could say that I have written from an emic perspective whilst at all times welcoming input from others. It has been my experience throughout the writing up process that colleagues and friends have been willing to comment. I hope that, in time, more readers will contribute to debate arising from my thesis through extracts that I will submit for publication in professional journals.

Returning to ethnography as an approach, there seem to be three common methods, variously defined, that can be also be recognised in my autoethnographic approach:

“Ethnographic data collection takes place mainly through observations, interviews and examinations of documents.”

(Holloway and Wheeler, 2002: 135)

Or as Wolcott, (1994) puts it:

“ ... participant observation (experiencing), interviewing (enquiring) and studying documents prepared by others (examining).”

Wolcott (1994: 10)

These three activities are interrelated in the work of the ethnographic researcher who may be expected to spend long periods of time immersed in, yet supposedly separate from, the culture being studied. Culture is of course implicit in the term ethnography for etymological reasons and is the factor that distinguishes ethnography from other research approaches:

“In the most general sense, ethnography refers to the study of the culture(s) a given group more or less share.”

van Manen (1995: 4)

As qualitative research developed ethnography was increasingly adapted for use in a wider range of settings where the ‘others’ being studied were closer to hand. Ethnographers here focus on taking a:

“ ... new perspective on that which is already familiar ... ”

Holloway and Wheeler (2002: 136)

Facilitation is my familiar professional sub-culture and this inquiry is an attempt to elicit a new perspective through engaging with my community of peers, contemporary and past. I am seeking to influence the practice of facilitation by clarifying some aspects of the nature, experience and development of facilitator presence, I have therefore been particularly mindful of the question:

“How does my own experience of this culture connect with and offer insights about this culture, situation, event, and/or way of life.”

Patton (2002: 132)

As ethnography progressed beyond its original boundaries so the taboo on use of the ethnographer’s own thoughts became blurred and in this respect I am reassured that my approach is grounded in learning from history. My inquiry has been an integration of practice development and comprehensive review, based on gradual accumulation of a diverse collection of autobiographical data. This includes relevant documentation (literature, etc) and observations made by other facilitators.

There are some notable limitations and difficulties with ethnography as an approach and these are also shared with autoethnography. There may be concern about the degree to which any account can be trusted or it may be seen as incomplete. The wise ethnographer (and autoethnographer) takes care not to make excessive claims to truth:

“No ethnographer wants or can ever be expected to take responsibility for providing the full and complete account of some group of people. Such a goal is unattainable. We do well to capture some of the relevant detail, and do even better when we can capture some of the elusive spirit of those among whom we study. Most fieldworkers try to capture and convey as much of the relevant scene as possible, but the wisest among them keep their public claims modest.”

(Wolcott, 1999: 29)

This modesty may signal an inextricable relationship between the ethnographic self and the personal self and, in turn, reinforce the need for caution:

“For an ethnographer, any experience – at home or abroad, of self or of other – offers the potential to become fieldwork. We select only a small

segment from the vast expanse of life encounters to write about. For me, my personal and my ethnographic persona have become so intertwined that it would be impossible for me to separate them out even if I wanted to do so ... ”

Bruner (1996: 317)

It is the way in which the reality of this relationship is confronted that autoethnography can ultimately be most clearly distinguished from ethnography by the centrality of:

“... self awareness about and reporting of one’s own experiences and introspections as a primary data source.”

Patton (2002: 86)

At this point I leave the topic of ethnography and turn to another methodology that is a key support to my inquiry. Clark Moustakas developed heuristic research; an approach that resonates strongly with autoethnography in that it is characterised by personal exploration and based upon the full engagement of the researcher. This methodology explicitly:

“ ... involves self-search, self-dialogue and self-discovery. Research questions and methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning and inspiration.”

Moustakas (1990: 11)

I had originally read his work some years ago and was impressed by the way that Moustakas had steadfastly paid attention to, and then systematically presented, his own experience. The resulting work gave order to his endeavours whilst honouring the more erratic and unpredictable nature of human experience. The academic rigour and the creativity with which Moustakas alchemically converted his life experience into a coherent and useful template for researchers impressed me greatly and has been, to some degree, my invisible guide. I have returned to his work on many occasions, considering my progress against the steps that he proposes. I now regard heuristic research as an important undertow to my work.

The Heuristic Undertow

Moustakas coined the term 'heuristic research' to encapsulate his work and describes this methodology as a:

"Process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience ... The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge."

Moustakas (1990: 9)

He further comments that:

"The root meaning of heuristic comes from the Greek word, heuriskein – meaning to discover or find."

Moustakas (1990: 9)

There is much overlapping between Moustakas' words regarding heuristic research and my own thoughts on autoethnography. Eliciting the meaning and increasing understanding based on my own experience with a view to increased self-awareness and finding ways to put this to practical use – all of these components are important aspects of both methodologies:

" ... heuristics is a passionate and discerning personal involvement in problem solving, an effort to know the essence of some aspect of life through the internal pathways of the self ... Our aim is to awaken and inspire researchers to make contact with and respect their own questions and problems, to suggest a process that affirms imagination, intuition, self-reflection, and the tacit dimension as valid ways in the search for knowledge and understanding."

Douglass and Moustakas (1985: 39)

Beyond the use of self I am also interested in the way that heuristic research can be distinguished from phenomenology and note that:

"Heuristics is a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher."

Patton (2002: 107)

My methodological route has taken quite a detour into phenomenology and my autoethnography remains, to some degree, written from a phenomenological perspective. It is therefore pertinent to note the way in

which Douglass and Moustakas (1985) distinguish between phenomenology and heuristic research. I summarise their work below, listing key points and commenting on how these link with my autoethnography.

“(1) Whereas phenomenology encourages a kind of detachment from the phenomenon being investigated, heuristics emphasises connectedness and relationship ... ”

Not only am I personally and professionally connected to the phenomenon of presence, but also to the practical context of facilitation that is crucially based on rapport. The degree to which those facilitated are willing and able to enter into relationship with the facilitator is of prime importance.

“(2) Whereas phenomenology permits the researcher to conclude with definitive descriptions of the structures of experience, heuristics leads to depictions of essential meanings and portrayal of the intrigue and personal significance that imbue the search to know ... ”

Autoethnography places great emphasis on personal significance in the search to know and I am deeply interested in the essential meaning of presence in relation to my work, especially where any development in my understanding can be translated into practical application.

“(3) Whereas phenomenological research generally concludes with a presentation of the distilled structures of experience, heuristics may involve reintegration of derived knowledge that itself is an act of creative discovery, a synthesis that includes intuition and tacit understanding ... ”

If this inquiry simply leads to knowing about presence, without a parallel increase in knowing how to be present as a facilitator, then it will have failed in the context of the professional doctorate, which has an aspiration to develop scholarly professionals. It is the utilisation of derived knowledge, including an increase in sensitivity to the intuitive and honing of tacit knowledge, into my facilitation that is key to my claim of practice development. My autoethnography includes many examples of such integration of knowledge into my day to day work.

“(4) Whereas phenomenology loses the person in the process of descriptive analysis, in heuristics the research participants remain visible in the examination of the data and continue to be depicted as

whole persons. Phenomenology ends with the essence of experience, heuristics retains the essence of the person in experience ... ”

Autoethnography is essentially drawn from self and this emphasis has demanded my full involvement in the inquiry. My experience has been the wellspring on which the research is based and from which the thesis has emerged. The person of my self as researcher/participant is evident on every page of my research account.

The Phases of Heuristic Research

Heuristic research can be thought of as a series of steps or stages, although in practice these are rarely followed with great precision. There are, however, six distinguishable phases that could:

“ ... guide unfolding investigations and comprise the basic research design. They include: the initial engagement, immersion into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, explication and culmination of the research in a creative synthesis.”

Moustakas (1990: 27)

In the following section I offer a glimpse of how these phases have transpired within my own inquiry.

Phase One - Initial Engagement

“The task of the initial engagement is to discover an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher ... invites self-dialogue, an inner search to discover the topic and the question.”

Moustakas (1990: 27)

My early deliberations were sparked by a few words and I entered into a conversational period, partly through self-dialogue and thinking and partly within my community of peers. The main focus at this early stage was facilitator distress.

Phase Two – Immersion

“The immersion process enables the researcher to come to be on intimate terms with the question – to live it and grow in knowledge and understanding of it.”

Moustakas (1990: 28)

I remained intensely engaged in that initial spark of interest in distress free authority and, as I lived and grew with my inquiry. In fact the immersion phase has been ever present though my inquiry it may be slightly more accurate, if convoluted, to say that I remain immersed in the questions triggered by the question that stimulated my inquiry. These developments have required me to make several shifts of focus and in the end I have devoted a significant amount of my thinking to the meaning of presence and the corresponding ability to be present, as a facilitator. I have made every effort to be constantly open to new levels of understanding, even through the thesis writing process and claim that being present to the task of writing resonates well with the overall focus of my inquiry.

Phase Three – Incubation

“Incubation is the process in which the researcher retreats from the intense, concentrated focus on the question ... a process in which a seed has been planted; the seed undergoes silent nourishment, support and care that produces a creative awareness of some dimension of a phenomenon ... ”

Moustakas (1990: 28)

I cannot recall a period of retreat from my inquiry but can recognise a sense of silent nourishment within which occasional glimpses from within my journal helped my inquiry to incorporate new insights and further questions as they occurred to me.

Phase Four - Illumination

“The process of illumination is one that occurs naturally when the researcher is open and receptive to tacit knowledge and intuition ... a breakthrough into conscious awareness ... a synthesis of fragmented knowledge.”

Moustakas (1990: 29)

Predictably in an inquiry such as mine, illumination has been a developing series of 'aha!' moments rather than one eureka event. It is also true to say that illumination has waxed and waned and could be compared with the task of tuning in a radio until the signal becomes clear.

Phase Five – Explication

“The purpose of the explication phase is to fully examine what has awakened in consciousness, in order to understand its various layers of meaning.”

Moustakas (1990: 31)

These various layers have required a long period of sorting, filtering and filleting of the vast amount of autoethnographic data. I began the final thesis by creating an imaginary structure of scaffolding to give me a provisional list of contents as a way of the results of my deliberations on the data. As my writing progressed the thesis became increasingly visible behind the scaffolding. Headings and sub-headings, sections and themes gradually replaced the rich but disorganised stream of consciousness and my piecemeal writing. My work is not finished and I trust that my post-doctoral work will go on to expose deeper meanings and insights.

Phase Six - Creative Synthesis

“The final phase ... the researcher is challenged to put the components and core themes into a creative synthesis. This usually takes the form of narrative depiction utilizing verbatim material and examples ... the researcher must move beyond any confined or restricted attention to the data itself and permit an inward life on the question to grow.”

Moustakas (1990: 32)

I have reached the point where I judge my synthesis to be acceptable as the best of my knowledge to date. At this level of education the student must be convinced and convincing. I am satisfied that my creative synthesis is appropriate to this level even though there remain many possibilities to develop my inquiry.

Validation of Heuristic Research

Moustakas goes on to discuss validation and I believe that this could be seen as a seventh phase, he suggests that:

“What is presented as truth and what is removed as implausible or idiosyncratic ultimately can be accredited only on the grounds of personal knowledge and judgement ...”

Moustakas (1990: 34)

In the light of my methodological choice and especially given the extensive use of personal knowledge embodied within autoethnography, who is to be the judge? I address this question in much more detail later in my thesis where I propose several options for judging an autoethnography.

Endnote to Methodology Section

This brings to a close my exploration of methodology. My entire inquiry has been informed by a broad study of the methodological landscape, and my route to, from and ultimately back to autoethnography has been inspired by a lengthy consideration of alternatives. I have included an affectionate nod of gratitude towards approaches with related etymological and procedural roots.

The nomenclature of more traditional research has often seemed at odds with my ever-present inquiry. I note the argument for emergent design flexibility:

“Openness to adapting inquiry as understanding deepens and/or situations change; the researcher avoids getting locked into rigid designs that eliminate responsiveness and pursues new paths of discovery as they emerge.”

Patton (2002: 40).

This resonates with my experience and is closely aligned to the principles of heuristic research outlined earlier. I agree that:

“Learning that proceeds heuristically has a path of its own ... It defies the shackles of convention and tradition ... pushes beyond the known, the expected or the merely possible, without the restraining leash of formal hypothesis, and free from external methodological structure that

limit awareness or channel it, the one who searches heuristically may draw upon ... direct experience."

Douglass and Moustakas (1985: 44)

In my attempts to honour my own experience and way of thinking I have shown how ethnography and anthropology inform my work, explained the way in which phenomenology is related and why heuristics is intertwined in my methodology. At times I have wondered whether the final result is a bricolage but conclude that it can be regarded as an autoethnography that simultaneously shows the development of my research knowledge alongside the recounting of my experience regarding facilitation.

My explorations have encouraged me to trust the centrality of my own experience of reality as it appears. The novelist John Steinbeck, and Ed Ricketts, a marine biologist, combined their skills as they recorded their journey of discovery to the Sea of Cortez as both a narrative (Steinbeck) and a scientific account (Ricketts). They prioritised a decision to honour their actual experience, whatever that may turn out to be, saying:

"Let's see what we see, record what we find and not fool ourselves with conventional scientific strictures" ... "None of it is important or it all is."

Steinbeck (2000: 2)

This combination of attention and inclusive acceptance is echoed by the *'Principle of Possible Relevance'*, a holistic theory espoused by Parlett (1991) in which he refers to a 'field' that includes person(s), environment, society and culture in which:

" ... no part of the total field can be excluded in advance as irrelevant, however mundane, ubiquitous, or apparently tangential it may appear to be ... "

Parlett (1991: 73)

These sentiments have supported my own unfolding and w/holistic journey and eased some concerns that my thinking may be fundamentally flawed. This sense of doubt is rooted in childhood experience, from moments when

people have told me that I ' ... think too much!' These assertions have often seemed:

- i) Slightly accusatory, as if of some wrongdoing on my part
- ii) A suggestion that I was somehow different (at least to the person commenting)
- iii) A suggestion that there is a way that I could and should think less

If the latter point is true, I must admit that I have not yet found that way! Instead I have honoured my thinking by engaging in this inquiry and attempting to move from the disorder and chaos of my stream of consciousness and convert disparate thoughts into a coherent statement.

I have entitled the next section 'My Autoethnography' although this remains only a part of the autoethnography that is my whole inquiry and the complete thesis. I have focused my observations on the theoretical aspect of my autoethnographic inquiry to this point and now turn more particularly to my lived experience of the task of facilitation.

MY AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

At the outset of my doctoral journey I was already becoming increasingly aware of my variable ability, when facilitating, to simply be present, with and for a group, in a distress free way. My autoethnography has been a prolonged inquiry into how I may reduce this variability and simply be fully present in my role all or most of the time. I hoped to increase my options for managing my experience of distress in order to reduce any negative impact.

My autoethnography does not end with a proclamation of how one should facilitate with presence but provides an account that includes examples of my struggle to develop and maintain presence and thereby increase my distress free authority.

I am frequently asked to facilitate individuals and groups who want support as they attempt to clarify and resolve issues arising from their practice. As we work together a confused and disparate picture usually emerges. Individuals rarely think in a linear way and confusion can be multiplied when people gather as groups.

As a way through this bewildering array of ideas I have often found it productive to encourage people to tell stories about their experience. Ultimately, in a culture where use of language is one of the key components of communication, the story, and therefore the telling of the story, is an important medium with which to elicit and communicate insights. The better crafted the words (even those used to explain traditional research findings within statistical or other analyses), the more likely the story will be understandable and applicable to practical use.

An Autoethnographic Approach to Data

But what is an autoethnographic story based upon; where is the data? As this piece of research is autoethnographic, there should be no difficulty in identifying the primary source of data:

“The initial data is within me, the challenge is to discover and explicate its nature.”

Moustakas (1990:13)

My data is drawn from experience, enmeshed in my thinking and evident in my behaviour that, for the purposes of this inquiry, manifests as my facilitator signature. I have therefore been concerned not to blur my autobiographical story with my autoethnographic data. Poignant, touching and deeply personal material has emerged from my experience and appeared in my writing but I have made considerable effort to report the relevant and omit the irrelevant.

Judging what was appropriate data was difficult, in the light of my previous assertion that either everything is important or none of it is. Paradoxically for an autoethnographer it may be that all the relevant data appears or is accessible through one simple case study, or even one moment. I recall working with a skilled psychotherapist some years ago. She maintained that a single sentence from a client was enough to provide all the necessary background material for effective therapy. The words the client used, those omitted, the tone and inflection, any accompanying body language and feelings ascribed to different words all became data for the therapist to help clients to understand themselves and, in turn, to provide the basis for new choices and therapeutic change.

And so:

“It wasn't curiosity that killed the cat. It was trying to make sense of all the data curiosity generated.”

Patton (2002: 440)

The concept of data analysis requires thought and adaptation when applied to qualitative methodologies. I enjoyed the witty way in which the distinction

between qualitative and quantitative analysis is made through the analogy of an exchange between a TV interviewer and a baseball player:

“Interviewer: “Qualitative Inquiry: ‘Last year you had 2 home runs all season. This year you have 5 in one month. What’s the difference?’”

Baseball player: Quantitative Analysis: ‘3’.”

Patton (2002: 558)

Notwithstanding this irreverent comment, I am committed to finding a way of making sense of the data at my disposal through the use of a filtering process rather than an analysis. Throughout my prolonged and lived inquiry, I have used many techniques to create a stream of words from which I could extract practical meaning in relation to facilitator presence. I siphoned off sections from my journals, capturing themes in metaphorical reservoirs that provided boundaries for particular areas of my thinking that later became sub-sections of my thesis.

I recognise how such segmentation is, to some degree, unnatural and constructed mainly for convenience. I nonetheless trust that the segments are functional, in supporting the reader to navigate my text, as well as offering an accurate and trustworthy representation of my work. I have seen how this gradual process of collating has enabled me to synthesise an increasingly clear and emergent understanding. As the pieces began to come together, the whole made more sense and, as meaning emerged, my hope increased that it would confirm the claim inherent in my methodology that:

“ ... nothing can replace the researcher’s personal digestion of the research experience in producing a description that is both valid and aesthetically communicative.”

Todres (2007: 13)

And so, the processes of data collection and analysis have intertwined since I began the DProf (and probably before) and it is from this collated material that I have constructed my report. I suggest that blurring is acceptable, and this point of view is supported by others:

“... overlapping of the data collection and analysis improves both the quality of the data collected and the quality of the analysis so long as

the fieldworker takes care not to allow these initial interpretations to overly confine analytic possibilities.”

Patton (2002: 437)

Given that mine is an introspective inquiry I have consistently paid attention to “*Things I overheard while talking to myself*” (Alan Alda, 2007). In practical terms this has meant a constant willingness to add to my journal in order to gather as much ‘unsolicited’ and unexpected data as possible. A prolonged filtering of the data has allowed me to craft a plausible description of my learning. I have also blended in the work of many others, published or not, in order to deepen and strengthen my final account.

I have also noted my increasing interest in creative approaches to data analysis. For example I was moved by the work of Fran Biley (2004) who suggests a technique of textual manipulation. He uses an original reflective account written by a nurse regarding the death of an adolescent patient and the presence of a parent at the time of death. He subjects this account (the data) to a computerised cutting program that reconfigures the words in a different order and comments:

“The original text is presented first, followed by the cut-up version produced by the computer program. This second version has been slightly edited for ease of reading – beyond this no other changes are made ... Although the original text is moving and revealing in its own way, the cut-up version reveals new patterns, manifestations, relationships and experiences – new appreciations of reality.”

Biley (2004: 145)

The particular point of relevance for me is the way that the versions clearly belong to each other, each is recognisably accurate, both are evocative and, in different ways, analyse the situation. I wonder what would emerge if I were to subject my list of contents to a cut-up program and re-order my thesis accordingly, allowing such randomness to replace my struggle to find the best, or even correct, order? This is another unturned stone.

My developing interest in creativity has not yet fully emerged as part of my practice, but shows promising signs in relation to my approach to writing in organisations, examples of which appear more naturally elsewhere in my

thesis. Overall a less structured approach is consistent with autoethnography although the freedom within such a methodology needs to be balanced by an academic responsibility to be clear about any departure from orthodoxy. I address this balance as part of my thinking, presented later, on how such work may be judged.

Returning to the general issue of data analysis one certainty that became apparent very quickly was that my research would not involve counting data. I realised that my commitment to autoethnography would mean that I needed to find a way of integrating my data through the way I express myself:

“In qualitative research, the tyranny of numbers is abandoned for the enigma of words.”

Jones (2004: 98)

My most pressing need has been to find a way of using my words in a way that is unambiguous and consistent rather than artificially enigmatic. I found support in the work of Carolyn Ellis, who facilitated one of the Masterclass events I attended on autoethnography. She used a simple technique to encourage those present to create an evocative piece of writing. We were asked to think of a single moment of personal significance and write freely about this experience. With this simple stimulus I was able to produce a short and very moving account of a very difficult personal event that came immediately to my mind.

I accepted an invitation to read my effort to colleagues at the Masterclass and was amazed by the positive feedback. The sense of sadness evoked in others and the respectful hearing that I felt my words were given was striking. As I reflected on this experience at the time of writing my thesis I decided that I did not want to evoke emotions just for the sake of doing so. I have therefore not included this piece in my thesis, as the content is not relevant to my autoethnography but it did highlight emergent ethical questions such as - what is it OK to write about, and, are my words provocative rather than evocative? I concluded that deliberate emotional provocation is of a dubious ethical nature.

On the other hand I was encouraged by a point that I heard Carolyn Ellis make, *'This is the story I seem to need to write just now'*. My thesis as a whole, and this section in particular, is the story that I seem to need to write. As an essentially private person, inclined to introversion, I am interested in the way that I step into another mode of being as I facilitate and am:

" ... intrigued by the specific moment when, as we sit waiting in the audience, the door to the stage opens and a performer steps into the light; or, to take the other perspective, the moment when a performer who waits in the semi-darkness sees the same door open, revealing the lights, the stage and the audience ... its embodiment of an instant of birth, of passage through a threshold that separates a protected but limiting shelter from the possibility and risk of a world beyond and ahead."

Damasio (2000: 3)

By writing publicly, and taking the additional risk of using autoethnography as my methodology, I am taking an additional step onto the stage. My thesis stands at the Rubicon between an inward and outward gaze as I take on the mantle of both actor and audience.

The insights gained at and around the time of the Masterclass with Carolyn Ellis encouraged me to explore what it is that am I trying to evoke in making my private experience public. I speculated that this may include empathy or understanding but concluded that my overall aim is to address a central tenet of my evaluation strategy in that I want my work to ring true.

Although I do not shy away from my emotional state in my life and work there are times that I do not express my feelings. Indeed, as I wrote and re-wrote my thesis I gradually eroded my emotional expression, my early drafts included accounts of being moved to tears or frozen by panic. It may be that as I learned to move more towards presence and away from distress the memories of the more difficult experiences have faded. My final thesis reintroduces and incorporates these memories through the use of journal notes and vignettes that appear throughout this document.

On the whole my distress as a facilitator has rarely been dramatic and I have few powerfully evocative examples from which to draw. My reality has been of a low-grade but repetitive anxiety, points during my work when I recognise that I have given up on an intervention or done something unnecessary based on my own feeling state rather than the needs of the group.

At times I have experienced a general sense that I will be found out and found wanting. As I look back on my working life – as I often do – I remember moments. I have a particular ability to remember moments that I have judged myself clumsy as a facilitator. I remember these times with extraordinary clarity regarding venue, the group present and the facilitation brief. I can see the scenario playing out in my mind's eye and relive the reactions of those facilitated that I observed during the process ... the raised eyebrows, the looks between people in the room that seemed to have judged my failures harshly.

Such instances had an instant impact and set up long-term memories. My imagination is able to take a small piece of such experiential data and grow it exponentially. It is my hope that my autoethnography (both study and account) will enable me to extract some learning from this dubious talent, and help me to use this more productively.

As I reflect on my more troublesome experiences of distress I note that my thoughts and emotions are usually accompanied by a somatic change - maybe a sense of overwhelming heat or a pang of nausea. The extreme version of this constellation of thoughts, emotional feelings and physical responses, is the epitome of self-consciousness (outlined earlier in my Iceberg Model) when my inner world completely over-rides my ability to be present. It is at these times that I am in most distress.

The following memorable example relates to a particularly painful memory of my entry into the corporate world, as I moved away from the relative safety of public health services - my usual organisational context. I recall preparing well, more than usual, to co-facilitate a two day event for senior executives in

a large company. I was to take the lead in presenting opening remarks and outlining the programme on offer, when I collapsed from self-awareness to self-consciousness in a dramatic fashion:

As I began I froze! Like a rabbit in the headlights! I experienced great heat. My own emotions, possibly anxiety and shame, competed for my attention. I looked up and saw a perplexed audience ... I looked down and my notes seemed to be written in hieroglyphics ... the words were blurred and I felt sweaty and hot, yet clammy and cold. All eyes were on me and expectations were high – I had to get this right as my inner self-talk reminded me (loudly) that this was my biggest ever pay day. I had to get this right!

Journal - 15/01/05

Moments like these are acute and debilitating bouts of self-consciousness from which I can claim a degree of credit for raising myself and trying again. On this occasion my presence was severely disturbed and I was in a state of deep distress that was transformed and concluded in a sweet and bitter fashion:

Years of experience came to my rescue. Moments or minutes later ... it seemed like hours ... I noticed a mirror on the wall. I could see the group in the mirror. I suggested that the group I was with was going badly but that the other group (the one in the mirror) looked like a better option. I thought aloud that I might go and work with them instead. As I relaxed and the group seemed to empathise with me there was a shift of energy, some hilarity and we moved on.

Initial feedback was amazement at my recovery. Later reaction was less positive. The organisation seemed to remember only my stumbling. A call several days later confirmed that I was to be taken off the programme.

Journal – 15/01/05

Being taken off this project was some relief as I did not have to go back and face the client while my self-esteem was still so bruised. On this psychological level my inner critic was most active, indeed this part of me seems to be ever watchful, waiting, shuffling noisily in the back of my mind, always ready to move swiftly to the front. This constant chatter could be labelled the 'voice of

judgement' and I have increasingly noted the cumulative effect that this voice can have in a group setting:

"The Voice of Judgement can stifle creativity for groups as surely as for individuals ... the continual, albeit often subtle, censoring of honesty and authenticity in a team. This collective Voice of Judgment tells people what they should or shouldn't say, do and even think. Often its effects become evident only in retrospect."

Senge et al (2005: 31)

I wonder if my sensitivity to my own inner critic is so high, at the time of examples such as the one above, that I cannot imagine that my distress is a reflection of the group process. I recall many professional conversations with my friend and colleague Jeremy Keeley, when he regularly asked me to consider the question "*supposing it was not about you?*" His intention was to encourage me to explore the possibility that my freezing, at an important point in the group process, may have been a reflection of the fear present in the group. This possibility was lost in my overwhelming feelings at the time.

I now have a much greater degree of presence –mind and emotion - from which I am able to consider the possibility that my own feelings reflect or relate to the group phenomenon in that moment. A recent example occurred in a group that I facilitate on a regular, monthly basis. One participant reflected that when she saw me arrive her heart sank:

I quickly realised that this was not a comment directed at me but was based on her internal realisation that the group needed to address a particularly tricky issue on that day. In the event her honesty and my ability to hold my own reaction, and remain present in my role as facilitator, helped the group to move forward on the pertinent issue.

Journal – 11/02/09

On the occasions that I can maintain such equilibrium and use my experience creatively it may be that I serve the needs of the group more completely. There are times when I increase the internal volume of my felt emotions, deliberately and consciously. For example, if I am aware of anxiety in myself I might declare this openly, wondering out loud whether there is anxiety in the

room ... 'I am feeling this ... is it just me?' Similarly with anger, joy, etc. I am learning to trust the background noise of my mind and the emotional states that fluctuate within me as I work. This allows me to be more able to find ways to increase my sense of presence and/or decrease my sense of distress. As my inquiry progressed I gradually accumulated a series of practical ideas and gathered that has become a separate section of my thesis.

I still wonder why I find it so easy to recall the difficult moments. From the outset of my inquiry colleagues have asked me what it was that attracted me to distress and this oblique feedback challenged me to inquire more deeply. Over the years since then I have pondered, speculated and pontificated. One possible explanation is that my work is often in the context of the role of helper – if my help is shunned I may feel rejected or not valued, and distress may emerge in me as a consequence. I did not focus on this particular possibility for further inquiry but I judged this would have led my study down an alternative avenue.

Instead I have moved towards the optimistic stance that the Kaleidoscope of ideas, gathered in a separate section later in this thesis, will support others taking a similar role and meeting similar issues. Having said this I do not make claim to a totally positive outcome and note that du Preez (2008), makes the following point after writing an autoethnography:

"I have experienced a sense of relief at having written this narrative ... I sense that this could be a redemptive story ... one in which the protagonist experiences some setbacks and even pain but that the outcomes are positive. Yet it is not a matter of 'happy ever after' ... "
du Preez (2008: 511)

This author goes on to identify with this point whilst acknowledging that:

" ... the failings and shortcomings contribute to my practice as a counsellor."
Du Preez (2008:511)

I am still not fully present every time I facilitate, indeed I have made it clear that this is highly unlikely that an individual will be able to achieve this state. There remains a fine balance between confidence in my ability to maintain full presence, and knowing that the unanticipated may throw me into distress. I can say that I am now more present, more of the time. I can and do recover more quickly and spot warning signs earlier. My preparation is generally clearer and based on a coherent model that helps to orientate my thinking throughout the process of facilitation from contracting to completion. I describe this model in more detail in the Kaleidoscope section. For now I offer a series of glimpses of my own professional education that have influenced my current practice.

Professionals of any discipline need to attend to their ongoing development, as there is not a point to be achieved where one knows completely. I therefore turn now to the importance I place on learning and include the wide range of opportunities that I have taken, throughout my career and during the period of my doctoral inquiry. I complete the following section with some examples of how I have gone on to create learning opportunities for others.

My Learnography

I have been connected to an organisational development consultancy for several years and have enjoyed the way that they use the novel concept of '*learnography*' as a format for partners and associates to illustrate their learning and talents. This technique replaces the more mechanistic style often found in a traditional CV. I follow the spirit of their creative idea in sharing my learning journey. My career has been a commitment to life-long learning, both as a learner myself, and in support of other people learning. My thesis is a comprehensive and up to date account of my progress to date.

A recurring theme in my inquiry has been my proposition that development of my practice as a facilitator is essential to my work. I believe that this will make it more likely it is that my interventions will have a positive impact on other people in the context of their practice. It may also be that some of the

ideas I share from my own learning history will be useful to other facilitators, although discussions with other facilitators suggest that the route to this profession is extraordinarily idiosyncratic. A general point I am making by including this section is that the development of facilitator presence can benefit from some focused education:

“ ... it is our experience that practice, coaching, discussion, modelling and training all help build presence. We believe, therefore, that there are elements of technical expertise that can be described, learnt, and developed.”

Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan (2007:15)

I recall and recount those things that have made the most difference to me in the spirit of a sincere wish to encourage each person to take his or her own path.

Education – Formal

My professional learning began when I trained in the field of mental health care and gained a basic understanding of people who were often experiencing the most difficult emotional times of their lives. I have particularly strong memories of working in a community-based team serving older people and their families when I gained much experience of being with people who were struggling with the effects of severe dementia. I have witnessed this disease process gradually making a striking impact on the person. It usually leaves the psychological presence of the sufferer in a depleted and compromised state, with a profound change of personality that accompanies a mental decline that is typical of all disease processes that are collectively termed 'dementia'.

The change in the personality of the sufferer is often manifest through the emergence of an extreme version of the presence of that person. This decline leaves those close to the sufferer dealing with unrecognisable behaviour emanating from a physical body that they know so well. I have heard dementia referred to as 'the onlookers disease'!

There is a potentially fruitful piece of linked inquiry here, in relation to the concept of presence. It is true that the person will often remain very present and obvious to others whilst bearing little resemblance to the former character. The onlookers witness this new presence very powerfully. It is not fully known how the sufferer experiences this change although there have been a range of published accounts written by people who describe the early stages of their dementia.

During my time as a community nurse in this field I was fortunate to meet a senior nurse, who was committed to whole person learning. Gretchen Pyves facilitated courses in 'Co-Counselling' – a holistic approach to personal development that is based on a simple set of techniques. These are learned and maintained in the context of a reciprocal contract, where the traditional hierarchical power relationship of helper and helped is replaced by collaborative power sharing that emphasises equality of time and skills. I recognise the influence of this early training in my current work in that I still use many of the techniques.

Co-counselling whetted my appetite and encouraged me to engage in a Diploma in Humanistic Psychology. This was a two-year course that was based on weekly group meetings that were memorable in many ways. A particular memory is the way in which we collectively experienced many variations of group silence, such as the angry one, the thoughtful one and the sad one. The programme included a wide variety of visiting facilitators who provided weekend workshops. I learned from a range of humanistic approaches within an educational approach that was predominantly experiential.

Following this period of study I was inspired to explore methods that involve non-verbal techniques and later participated in a course entitled 'Regression and Integration' based on the work of several practitioners and scholars including Grof (1976) and Emerson (1984). The course was developed and facilitated by Mike Eales and Anouk Graves, who modelled a superb balance of knowledge and experience. They used powerful techniques designed to

help participants to engage with memories held in the body that stemmed from pre-verbal experience, particularly the universal experience of birth. Beyond the theory and techniques they were teaching, the thing I recall most strongly was their presence.

Up to this point my professional learning had been more experiential and vocational than academic. I recognised and addressed this gap through participation in the inaugural MSc in Change Agent Skills and Strategies at the University of Surrey, which placed a strong emphasis on the practical aspects of change whilst also demanding the academic rigour required at Masters level. The programme initially focused on change processes at individual, group and organisational levels and subsequently explored skills and strategies that relate to these levels. I recall creating a peer-assessed portfolio for each module that showed evidence of learning and professional changes alongside the more traditional requirements for substantial written work culminating in a dissertation.

On a less formal level I have engaged in short courses, day conferences and workshops throughout my career. During the period of my doctoral inquiry I took many opportunities to attend a variety of events, selected to help me focus on the theme of presence. There were many highlights on this learning journey and I offer some examples at this point.

Facilitation may require some of the skills that one may find in actors and with this in mind I attended a one-day practical workshop entitled *Speaking with Authenticity*, facilitated by two professional actors who focused on breathing and posture as key elements to enable authentic speaking. The workshop style was strongly based on the use of accurate feedback and, to this end, the facilitators filmed everyone in the group, as individuals, trying out the newly learned techniques.

I learned that with a modicum of courage, a willingness to try out new ways of being, a close connection with my own story and practising new skills it is

possible to be more present ... by putting out my own message clearly I may create space to be more attentive to the group.

Journal – 21/04/07

The facilitators were able to convince all participants that self-perception is not a reliable benchmark. As individuals experimenting with speaking louder we all felt that we were shouting but when everyone else in the room disagreed with this we were encouraged to reconsider the reliability of our internal feedback loops. This was a key learning point for all present.

In a similar vein I attended a workshop that sought to blend artistic endeavours with organisational consulting. Participants selected a sub-group activity that evoked the greatest anxiety for them. Options included dance, life drawing, singing and drama. My own choice was based on a fear of singing in public that I have held since my schooldays - I was certain that I could not sing! With excellent teaching and facilitation I became a full participant in a rapidly created singing performance. This was for me a stunning experience in which a belief that I strongly held about myself was completely reversed in the space of half a day:

Yesterday was quite incredible. I feel as if I entered an altered state of consciousness. Feedback about my singing voice was amazing and ... matched my own sense of the reality.

Journal – 20/10/04

Both of these workshops touched on the emotional impact of working in public, with groups:

“For most people the thought of standing up in front of a group of people is a terrifying experience. Fear of failure, fear of forgetting what to say, how to stand, breathe, what to do with your hands, these things can dominate a speaker so much that any chance of communicating effectively and with authenticity become almost impossible.”

According to S. Evans and M. Charlesworth (personal communication 2007)

There may be a more technical level (represented by the speaking course) and a more emotional level (represented by the singing). I discovered that both might be engaged as building blocks of learning that are common across fields where public speaking or performance is required. It is not that facilitation is a performance but there are times when one needs to speak and be heard, however one may be feeling, and so it is useful to have some technical and emotional capacity to be able to do so in a group setting.

There were other events that I attended during the course of the DProf, which merit a mention. These include:

- A one-day conference on Spirituality in Health Care that was potentially promising yet (for me) disappointing. The presenter attempted to facilitate a group of 60 and I experienced a contradiction between his controlling behaviour and his claim to be anti-authoritarian. With hindsight I see that he modelled an antithesis of what I believe to be facilitator presence.
- A 5-day residential course focusing on Holotropic Breathwork, which is:

“ ... a systematic approach to transpersonal healing, spiritual inquiry and self-exploration developed by Stanislav ... and Christina Grof. The method ... is safe, co-creative and can access ... all levels of human personhood, including emotionally charged childhood experiences.”

Lahood (2006)

The process of Holotropic Breathwork focuses on the non-verbal, evoked through a simple breathing technique, supported by the use of powerful and rhythmic music. Instructions were given to follow the mood, movement, sounds and wisdom of the body, under the watchful eye of a co-participant acting as supportive guide and the overseeing provided by the facilitator, who was available to provide further support, guidance and suggestions.

The non-verbal process was followed through silent expression on paper, using colours in artistic form within a circle (mandala) and then a period of verbal processing completed the cycle with participants reporting back on the experience and insights gained. This ending was facilitated patiently with no

apparent attention to clock time. We finished when all participants had been heard.

This course, spanning 5 days, was a fantastic experience! The facilitator explained and maintained safe boundaries through clear, simple explanations of the process to be followed and the underlying theory that informed this process. He modelled a strong, firm presence from the outset, manifest in his physical being and an acute ability to respond to questions and challenges from the group. This modelling was reinforced as we progressed; throughout the course he did what he said he would do and gently encouraged participants out of their comfort zones without ever seeming to apply pressure for them to do so.

The presence of this facilitator was an exemplar of the presence that I am seeking to describe. He didn't appear to panic when participants were in distress, he simply stayed with the process that he had offered and that we as adults had agreed to take part in, he seemed entirely in control of himself and therefore had no apparent desire to control the group.

This was a sophisticated group in some senses; in that there was a willingness to engage in bold experiential work that is outside the norms of most contemporary education. There was a shared willingness to risk evoking and fully experiencing strong and deeply felt emotions and a parallel acceptance of responsibility for ones own emotional states.

Later I reflected on how these strong feelings are suppressed or allowed to 'play out' in everyday encounters and note that I am increasingly curious about how I might take the learning from such highly experiential settings into the mainstream of my work with people, as a facilitator and coach.

- One further example of my intense and committed approach to learning that requires special mention is the 5-day co-operative inquiry at John Heron's home in New Zealand. The learning I gained was rich and in many ways manifest in my thesis, the writing of which began in earnest

shortly after this learning experience, and co-incidentally, following the second Masterclass on autoethnography that I attended the day after my return to the UK.

For the record Co-operative Inquiry is a form of research devised and developed by John Heron. It is approach to research that is politically concerned with changes in self and society. The core text from which to gain the basic understanding is Heron (1996). Other authors support the usefulness of this approach to practice:

“So, in a co-operative inquiry, a group of people come together to explore issues of interest and concern. All members of the group contribute both to the ideas that go into their work together, and also are part of the activity being researched. Everyone has a say in deciding what questions are to be addressed and what ideas may be of help; everyone gets involved in the activity that is being researched; and ... has a say in whatever conclusions and outcomes the co-operative inquiry group may reach.”

OASIS (1999: 1)

I turn next to two Masterclass events that were particularly pertinent to my methodological choice.

Attendance at Masterclass Events

My learning regarding autoethnography has included attendance at two Masterclass events on the subject, both of which significantly influenced my inquiry.

Masterclass One

The first event showcased two examples of autoethnography, presented by the researchers themselves. The presenters utilised a narrative style, blended images (photographs of people and places) with the use of evocative music. Both presentations were drawn from personal and difficult life experiences, during which powerful emotions seem to have influenced the production of their work.

I sensed a similarity to art (visual, performative and musical), as I have heard artists express the way in which deep and distressing emotions can be a great stimulus to their work and wondered whether autoethnography must always be linked to distress. I recalled my own starting point and the shift in my mind from Heron's notion of distress free authority to the more difficult experience of facilitator distress. In my case autoethnography has underpinned a distinct development towards a more positive end, i.e. developing presence as a facilitator.

In another possible link to art I was interested to note that both Masterclass presenters stated their openness to questions and comments about their autoethnographies. In the event the group present struggled to challenge their work. Maybe the content seemed sacrosanct, and the emotions appeared to be personal and unequivocal. I have still not entirely fathomed why this difficulty existed (bearing in mind that this could be entirely my own perception). This experience led me to wonder whether there is an underlying obstacle inherent in the critique of autoethnography, or whether there is something in my own psychological history that is relevant. The following journal note gave clues but was not conclusive:

As I left the Masterclass I was conscious of how I had struggled to find a comment. The issues were:

- *Not wanting to divert from their story with my reaction ... ergo my story*
- *That my story played out anyway, i.e. the struggle to find my voice and 'claim' my space and that this has been a lifelong struggle (1 of 7, 1 of a class, becoming a listener by profession.*
- *All have played to my strengths and have reinforced my weaknesses.*
- *The DProf gives me a chance to reverse the imbalance*

Journal – 24/02/06

The implication for my own autoethnography is that I have sought and encouraged dialogue throughout the period of my inquiry. This has been important as it is the degree to which this whole work resonates with other facilitators that is particularly relevant in deciding whether my inquiry can be regarded as meeting the research requirements of the professional doctorate.

I found that the more I talked with colleagues, the greater the sense of collegiality I experienced. Other facilitators *got it* and there was no doubt that I was in tune with others. I was relieved that other facilitators disclosed their tendency to amplify inner concerns, although I am reticent about admitting the comfort I experienced when I realised that this was a mutual misery! This sense of resonance did however reassure me that I was on the right track.

There is also an inherent requirement to be evocative if one is to seek academic approval through the particular methodological lens of autoethnography. This Masterclass informed my initial resolve to err towards an analytic approach as I judged there to be a requirement to demonstrate a sufficiently scholarly approach. My decision was confirmed as a result of attending a further Masterclass that occurred as I was beginning to draw together my learning and embark on writing the thesis.

Masterclass Two

The second Masterclass held at the University was entitled 'Writing Autoethnography' and led by Carolyn Ellis, a renowned and widely published author(ity) on the subject. This event helped me to clarify several points about my own approach to autoethnography that went beyond the academic knowledge that I was accumulating. In particular I noted the tension between trying to carry out autoethnography by a set of given rules and the absence of such explicit rules.

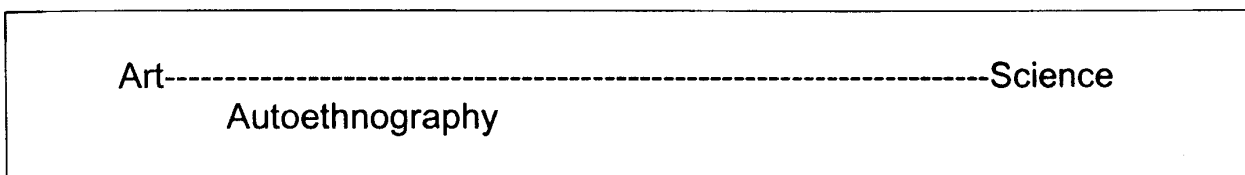
As my desire for pre-existing rules decreased I noted my willingness to adopt methods that would embrace diverse approaches to data collection. At that stage I wanted all of my experience, each observation and scrap of writing I had created, to be available for inclusion. I was immersed in data but, like the proverbial fish, the existence of the sea was not obvious to me and I seemed to be the last to recognise the water:

*"Who was that research
I saw you with last night?"*

*That was no research
That was my life"*

Reason and Rowan (1981: front cover)

I asked myself - if the data are everywhere and I am constantly in touch with it then where should I begin, and where should I be aiming to be at the end of my inquiry? It is from this baseline of total involvement that I searched for an alternative to dogma and noted that Carolyn Ellis utilised a continuum with art at one extreme and science at the other:



She suggested that autoethnography is located towards the artistic end of the continuum and this resonated with the impression I had formed at the first Masterclass and with my own developing professional practice. I increasingly regard my facilitation as an aspect of my own artistic being, my presence is most apparent when I am being creative. The practical and alchemical ability to facilitate is a combination of skills, attitudes and experience. This blend makes up the facilitator signature that is the hallmark of ones artistic presence.

The Shift to Presence

The emergence of the concept of presence marked my arrival at the issue that was ultimately at the heart of my inquiry. The question of how to create, develop or enact presence most effectively as a facilitator is the cornerstone on which my inquiry stands. Several background questions helped to guide my thoughts, these include:

1. What is presence?
2. Is it possible for a facilitator to deliberately decide to be present?
3. Am I able to be present – at all – some of the time – more than currently?

The first of these questions is addressed in a lengthy section on the concept of presence that is located in my comprehensive review. On the second question, it seems unlikely that one can simply decide to be present. In fact any attempt to consciously do so may prevent such ability and I have a tongue in cheek image of frantically drawing attention to myself as I am working with a group, waving and saying, "Look! Here I am, being present!"

The third question seemed to be the richest with possibility and I have utilised, developed and adapted a range of autoethnographic methods to generate data to address this inquiry. My key methods have included:

- Journal writing and morning pages
- Self interview schedule
- Facilitator Distress Workshop(s)
- Distress and Presence Workshop
- Sadler Heath workshop

Journal Writing and Morning Pages

I recall many occasions when the University supervision team encouraged me to take every opportunity to write. This guidance was useful and has meant that at the heart of my research is a deep well of autoethnographic data. The discipline of writing has been my key companion:

"Journals may be used to generate creative ideas either at random or through focus on a particular project, or they can record and facilitate the development of the project itself."

Moon (1999: 43)

My journal writing has been a two-pronged activity and my decision to use this method was based on previous experience in that I have frequently written such logs to support project work within both academic and practice settings. I agree with Jennifer Moon who emphasises the usefulness of journals:

"A learning journal is essentially a vehicle for reflection. Probably all adults reflect, some more than others, and for those who do reflect,

being reflective can represent a deeply seated orientation to their lives."

Moon (1999: 5)

Initially I began by collecting and collating notes in a formal series dated entries and my original journal became the recording vehicle for notes relating to my group and individual supervision sessions. I captured stray thoughts, scraps of ideas and anything that seemed to relate to my research.

At a later stage of my studies, I incorporated the second prong, a more creative and innovative approach based on the work of Julia Cameron. Her book 'The Artist's Way' is written for people who want to develop their creative potential and includes basic tools to support the removal of blocks to creativity. One of these tools is:

" ... the morning pages ... three pages of longhand writing, strictly stream of consciousness" ... in which ... "nothing is too petty, too silly, too stupid or too weird to be included."

Cameron (1994: 9)

As the routine of writing morning pages became my norm I began to use this practice as a way of connecting to my doctoral studies. I made a conscious decision to:

Use the research journal (artist's way) as a way of uncovering material as I go.

Journal - 12/10/04

This meant having a focus rather than being completely free but this change did not block my stream of consciousness, instead it provided an anchor for my efforts. My focus included the challenges of the day ahead (or indeed the previous day) and I began to notice how ideas of both a practical and theoretical nature appeared in my writing, providing glimpses of many different layers of thoughts regarding my professional work.

My journals (of both types) both reassured and haunted me until I was well into the writing process. I knew that they contained a wealth of potentially useful material but laboured long on how I might turn this potential into the reality of a thesis. I left these notes untouched during the middle stages of my inquiry and when I returned to the morning pages I began to convert the material into a series of distilled notes. These notes then formed the basis of a collection of more sophisticated data from which my thesis has developed.

I now turn to a range of other activities that I used as methods to collect data. Some of these activities were simultaneously opportunities to share learning and deepen my inquiry.

Self Interview Schedule

At an early stage in my inquiry I developed a novel research tool to help me to pay attention to what I was thinking. This was an idea that occurred to me before I had committed to autoethnography:

I noticed an idea emerge that I should ask others to interview me regarding MY thoughts on the subject and experience of facilitator distress.

Journal - 13/9/04

After discussing the idea in supervision and receiving encouragement to tape the interview, I considered the practicalities of the matter and looked ahead to how any data arising would be transcribed and subsequently analysed.

I approached a colleague to interview me about my understanding of facilitator distress. I am indebted to Jeremy Keeley for his time and support in this respect and transcribed this piece of work immediately post-interview. On my return to the transcript in the later stages of my doctorate I found material that was potentially useful yet disappointingly disparate. I concluded that it would have been possible to really develop and use this technique to create an alternative bank of data. In particular there were many points of interest

that could have been explored more deeply in a follow up interview. I may have discovered a promising method that could have been developed as a distinctive feature of my autoethnography, but I did not consider this at the time and, at the writing-up stage, can do little more than acknowledge the potential missed.

On a more positive note this exercise prompted the development of a series of workshops, in that Jeremy and I sensed that distress was an issue that was of interest to many other facilitators. We proceeded, from the self-interview process, to develop a format for learning events that attracted participants from a variety of commercial and freelance backgrounds. The outcome has been that we have co-facilitated several day workshops and the progress we have made with these events is outlined next. It is often said that one only really learns about a subject when called to teach about it and I see this as a further example of my autoethnographic approach to practice development.

Learning Opportunities I Created for Others

Facilitator Distress Workshops

The first workshop took place 18 months into my doctoral work and most attendees had many years of experience as facilitators. The programme offered a balance of theoretical input, a review of relevant literature, individual reflection time and shared learning through pair and small group discussion and had the key aims of helping participants to identify their own triggers for distress (whilst facilitating). We wanted to support these colleagues to understand, manage and reduce such distress.

Feedback was very positive, and included the comment from one participant that it had left her with a knowing smile. I noted an interesting connection between this reaction and the feeling I experienced when Jeremy commented on my style, referring to me as an artist. In both cases I felt recognised in a way that touched a deep desire in me to be seen as an artist rather than a scientist:

When Jeremy said 'you are an artist' it made me want to cry. Like the first dawn of being seen. The problem with the doctorate is that it may take me down a scientific path ... is it possible to undertake an artistic doctorate in professional practice? ... As a professional facilitator I only borrow from science, I am not a scientist. My art is serving ... "

Journal – 8/10/04

The feelings evoked by this incident may sit at the heart of my autoethnography in that it is directly linked with the sense of presence that I particularly want to achieve in my work.

Several years later, during the period of writing up my thesis, Jeremy and I elaborated the material from our first workshop and added the concept of presence. We have recently co-facilitated two events entitled 'Distress and Presence Workshop'. Once again these events interested experienced facilitators across a wide range of organisational settings and feedback suggested that it was inclusion of the concept 'distress' that attracted participants, even though our aim and focus emphasised the development of presence in the facilitator.

Sadler Heath Workshop

Earlier in this thesis I outlined the emergence of my Iceberg Model of facilitation as I was co-facilitating a learning event hosted by Sadler Heath, an organisation that has been:

" ... established for those of us who want to take responsibility for their own long-term personal development and thought leadership by working together with like-minded people in a safe and supportive environment. Sadler Heath is focused on people working in all types of organisations who want a permanent space independent of their organisation to support their long-term development and to provide them with support from others with a similar need."

Sadler Heath (2008)

My regular attendance at Sadler Heath events demonstrates my commitment to collaborative and shared learning and I have recently been invited to

become one of a small group of moderators who will support the expansion of the Sadler Heath ethos across several sites, in the UK, and other European centres.

Concluding remarks

The process of data analysis has been lengthy and time consuming and has been drawn from diverse sources that have included written artefacts such as my journals, along with a variety of reflective accounts about the many learning opportunities that I have taken for myself and created for others.

I return now to focus on a particular section that emerged from my data analysis and to which I have made mention several times in previous pages. The idea of creating a Kaleidoscope Section occurred to me early in the DProf process and I have gathered a range of practical tips, exercises and strategies that have helped me to develop my presence as a facilitator.

The following section is in many ways my autoethnographic practice development exemplar as it is based on my developing practice and offers potential support to my community of peers.

KALEIDOSCOPE SECTION

Within the professional doctorate there is a key focus on communicating ones findings in a way that enables practice to develop. I have therefore included this section as a key component in the way that I address this issue. The Kaleidoscope section offers a variety of ways in which a facilitator can increase their ability to be present and thereby reduce the negative effects of distress, enabling them to work more effectively. This involves an ability to manage current feelings, past memories and ongoing experiences, all of which can destabilise ones sense of presence.

Earlier in my thesis I explored the literature on Practice Development and noted that McSherry and Warr (2008) in particular offer an excellent framework of supportive and developmental mechanisms that will promote Practice Development. The components that these authors provide are equally relevant for the practising and developing facilitator. These include:

- Codes of professional conduct
- Continuing professional development/lifelong learning
- Reflective practice, supervision, mentoring and preceptorship
- Research awareness
- Critical companionship, networking, team building
- Action Learning
- Leadership awareness
- Evaluation methods

The Kaleidoscope of ideas presented here is inextricably linked to practice development and my intention is to offer a series of ways forward that I have found personally and professionally helpful. I do not suggest that mimicking my experience, or following my ideas, will guarantee success as a facilitator. In fact I do not believe that adherence to anyone else's model is the way forward, and prefer a more cautious approach articulated in a Chinese proverb that I noticed on an exhibit at a modern art exhibition:

"If you find the path, that is the path, then it is not the path".

I have been sensitive, perhaps over-sensitive, to a concern not to put all my eggs into one basket by committing to a particular model or school of thought. I recall two brief snippets of conversation that give insight into my indecision.

The first one was:

Me: *"I've found a great book with some excellent insights into how I might develop."*

Friend: *"Another one! Why don't you just do what any one of them says?"*

The second occasion was different in that I was encouraged to use the innate wisdom of the human condition:

Me: *"I'm thinking of following the Alexander Technique"*

Supervisor: *"Why don't you just stand up straight?"*

Both of these comments were somewhat dismissive of my attempts to improve and learn but I see that both comments contain common sense and insight.

During academic supervision in November 2007, as my writing was gradually showing some semblance of order, Jerry Warr (one of my supervisors) commented on the series of discarded models he found in the early draft of my thesis. This comment felt very pertinent and as I reflected on my constant search for alternative ways of working I wondered if this may prevent me from developing an eclectic model, based on the best that I know (so far), that would support me in my work.

I am beginning to recognise that the lack of a consistent and coherent model may contribute to my distress and thereby interrupt my ability to be present. On the other hand, in defence of my perennial unwillingness to commit, I agree with Guignon (2004) who criticises models used in the arena of self-

help. He does not refute the fact that they may be to some degree helpful, but makes his objections out of a concern that:

“... they are one-sided. That is why latching onto them as if they were the answer ... cuts you off from a sensitivity to other virtues and ideals that are not only equally good, but are absolutely essential to living a meaningful and fulfilling life.”

Guignon ((2004: ix)

As a gentle note of further caution, I am curious about the way that I extend my repertoire by learning and integrating a skilled intervention that I have seen modelled by another facilitator. After this becomes part of my own facilitator signature I often later reflect that this new skill seems to become ordinary in my hands, rather than the excellent talent that I modelled my work upon. It is as if this is a skill when someone else does it and not a skill when I can. Maybe other facilitators will recognise this negative attitude towards their own performance and take steps to alleviate such negativity.

The Kaleidoscope section has a core aim of supporting facilitators to develop their own, unique, way of facilitating, that is fundamentally based on their own experience. This individuality can be construed as a philosophical and behavioural signature that will be recognisable to those facilitated and to the facilitator him/herself. So, for example, whilst I do not adhere completely to one model I do use an ongoing cycle of inquiry as my core methodology. This cycle seeks to promote clarification through my use of listening, feedback, dialogue and adjustment. These elements are certainly integral to my way of working.

Organisation of Ideas

In considering the way that I might organise the Kaleidoscope (possibly a contradiction in terms!) I originally expected that it would emerge as a model based on some simple design and considered several possible formats, as follows:

Time commitment

Some of the ideas I suggest may take a moment, others will need a week, a month or longer but on balance I do not propose a set time for each item, as some of the simplest of ideas can take a lifetime to achieve. Writing morning pages or taking up a meditative practice can be used for specific periods of time but they can also become integrated with daily life as an ongoing commitment.

On a Continuum - From Simple Ideas to Complex Plans

Apparently simple models can also turn out to be complex, and vice versa, but for the practical purposes of my Kaleidoscope I offer one example from both of these loose categories.

The simple model is drawn from my practice supervision. My supervisor suggested that people have traits that are broadly analogous to Owl and Tigger, characters in 'Winnie the Pooh' (written by AA Milne). Tigger is louder than Owl, more effusive and always ready to use dramatic techniques for effect. My current professional supervisor likened me to Owl, in that I am relatively introverted, an avid reader and always contemplate at length on my work. She has focused on supporting me to become '*a Liberated Owl*' rather than encouraging me to become Tigger, especially a pretend Tigger and I trust that my thesis will be a manifestation of my Owl-ish liberation!

Bryce Taylor (2004), has drawn together a more complex model, in collaboration with colleagues at the Oasis School of Human Relations, an organisation concerned with the development of people, particularly those who are engaged in public service, within statutory, voluntary or commercial sectors. The importance of relationship is emphasised, not only in facilitation, but also in the context of many 'helping' roles. I include an extended quote from this work at this point:

“Together they have to form a working alliance within a set of ... boundaries. The work has to be undertaken and some evaluation of its consequences and value has to be made. The Seven Stage Model is an excellent tool for fulfilling these needs. The model is summarised below:

Contacting:	<i>Initial meeting and expectations</i>
Contracting:	<i>Agreeing boundaries, conditions and contracts. Finding level of commitment.</i>
Clarifying:	<i>Outlining and exploring the range of concerns.</i>
Challenging:	<i>Confronting ambiguities and inconsistencies of belief.</i>
Choosing:	<i>Moving towards consideration of new responses or behaviours.</i>
Changing:	<i>Initiating and maintaining a strategy.</i>
Closing:	<i>Ending the session and closing the relationship.”</i>

Taylor (2004: 241)

This author offers a deep understanding of the sources that he has drawn upon, and integrated into his work and I regard this as a comprehensive and practical model.

Location of a Technique or Idea in the Facilitation Contract

A third possibility is to focus on the stages of before, during and after facilitation. This approach could easily be combined with the more detailed categorisation offered in the Seven Stage Model (Taylor 2004), above.

Before - At the contracting phase one may mistakenly ignore an instinctive feeling about the proposed work. I am learning to trust my instinct and have found that simply articulating and exploring any dis-ease, which I may be experiencing, can lead to the creation of a more appropriate piece of work and/or enable both parties to withdraw honourably.

During – On the day of the facilitated session the facilitator must rely on a combination of preparation, experience and responsiveness to the group, all of which manifest as ‘on the spot’ decisions that are ideally based on the well developed presence of the facilitator.

After – The facilitator may need specific supervision to reflect upon, and clarify, a contentious issue arising from the piece of work. There are other occasions when revisiting a particular weakness, or building on a particular strength, can become part of an ongoing process of reflection on practice.

The supportive and challenging mechanism of supervision is central to my own work and I therefore explore it in more depth later in this section. I see supervision as current and life-long, simple yet complex and necessary at all points of the facilitation contract as I negotiate, deliver and conclude a piece of work. Whilst it is usually seen as a retrospective technique, to be utilised after an event it clearly has a proactive function. Reflective techniques can be even be used in the moment, as a form of self-supervision. In short, reflection on and in practice is, in my view, essential for the competent and professional facilitator.

The Kaleidoscope of Presence

As my work progressed, an unfolding series of themes regarding presence emerged to become sub-sections of the Kaleidoscope Model. I now proceed by offering a brief explanation of each theme along with practical and related ideas and exercises that are primarily drawn from my first hand experience. I believe that it is generally good practice to recommend only what one is prepared to try, especially where one has tried it already. In fact using the group as a 'guinea pig' to experiment with new ideas rarely works and is ethically questionable and quite different from collaboratively agreeing an experimental way forward.

My aim is to offer this selection of ideas in the spirit of co-inquiry rather than from an assumed point of authority. I have a longer-term intention to develop this section of my thesis beyond my current inquiry and see it as the prototype for my next phase of professional development during which I will forge a clearer link with my Iceberg Model, introduced earlier in this document.

Presence as a Natural State

It could be argued that presence is a natural human state, needing no development whatsoever. However, in the context of facilitation, the ability to maintain and develop appropriate and useful presence requires further consideration. On a day-to-day basis this will include bringing greater conscious attention to naturally occurring or spontaneous opportunities to develop presence. These include chance meetings, one-off conversations, calls, e-mails and the like. On an informal basis friends may be willing to give the opportunity to simply talk things through and to challenge or support from a position of care. More formally I put a great deal of energy into a variety of networks, as these can provide professional life-blood.

All of the above can be used more consciously, as part of an active strategy to develop presence. Josie Gregory (2007) seems to agree by listing a whole host of suggestions, which I regard as helpful ways in which we can extend our natural state of being, in ways that will promote presence. She offers

“Create a peer learning group with others who have the same and more advanced leadership styles. Support and challenge each other to be continually flexible in thinking, feeling and behaving. Give honest constructive feedback. Change your communication style to appreciative inquiry. Change your hairstyle; change your dress code; change how you get out of bed; change how you communicate with others. Do things differently just for the fun of it. Break down habits of thought and action no matter how useful/successful they seem. Break the mould.”

Gregory (2007: 5)

The sheer ordinariness of some of these suggestions appeal to me, as they, for the most part, require nothing more than a willingness to experiment. However, just beyond the natural state of presence lie the murky depths of self-consciousness, illustrated in my Iceberg Model. This difficulty of self-consciousness is alluded to in the following:

“ ‘Just be yourself,’ people say, as if they have suddenly thought of something entirely original ... to be yourself is to be no self at all but to be the frontier, the frontier between you and the audience ... Vulnerability and intimacy can make a frightening shoreline. But that is

a wave line that we must walk in work. Work is exposure, our fancy ideas about ourselves a sandcastle built right at the edge of the incoming sea. Hence those long, night time dream rehearsals which have us practising the dramatic confrontation, facing the waves, or the immensity of faces, as naked as the day we were born."

Whyte (2001: 147)

There is a boundary between naturally occurring self-awareness and the poetic description of distress-laden thinking provided by Whyte. I believe that this edge requires much attention if one is to maintain equilibrium. The balance may be gained through ones general intention to act authentically whilst also recognising the need to develop an ability to be 'professionally natural' by doing simple things to enhance this capacity and thereby increasing the likelihood of being present. There is of course a paradoxical angle to this statement but I have arrived at the belief that simply accepting such a state as instinctive, or even God-given, makes human attempts to develop this state rather futile, and I have gathered much evidence that this is not the case:

"It is perhaps this notion that has led to the idea of presence as something ineffable and indescribable deliverable by 'grace' alone. Nonetheless, it is quite clear to us that certain factors seem to compromise one's chances of being/having presence. For example, being tired or unwell, having taken particular medication or excessive alcohol, being distracted or preoccupied, and equally important, having too many agendas, plans, tasks or outcomes in mind."

Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan (2007:15)

The Kaleidoscope Section therefore offers many ideas that may support the development of a professional presence. As a starting point I consider the bedrock of professional practice, i.e. working from a clear ethical position.

An Ethical Presence

As a foundation for professionalism I see the vital importance in taking an ethical stance on which the facilitator can build. For some people this may mean creating a statement of philosophy by listing a series of 'I believe' statements and integrating these into ones practice. Such statements can be

formalised, as in the work of the International Association of Facilitators. I offer a slightly abridged version of their Code of Ethics at this point:

- *Client Service* - We are in service to our clients, using our group facilitation competencies to add value to their work.
- *Conflict of Interest* - We openly acknowledge any potential conflict of interest.
- *Group Autonomy* - We respect the culture, rights, and autonomy of the group. We seek the group's conscious agreement to the process and their commitment to participate. We do not impose anything that risks the welfare and dignity of the participants, the freedom of choice of the group, or the credibility of its work.
- *Processes, Methods, and Tools* - We use processes, methods and tools responsibly.
- *Respect, Safety, Equity, and Trust* - We strive to engender an environment of respect and safety where all participants trust that they can speak freely and where individual boundaries are honoured. We use our skills, knowledge, tools, and wisdom to elicit and honour the perspectives of all.
- *Stewardship of Process* - We practice stewardship of process and impartiality toward content.
- *Confidentiality* - We maintain confidentiality of information.
- *Professional Development* - We are responsible for continuous improvement of our facilitation skills and knowledge.

IAF (2002)

With these underpinning principles in place I now turn to the deeper work of self-awareness, which I believe to be a lifetime task.

Presence as Self-Awareness

I recall reading many years ago that the sculptor and artist Michelangelo was asked how he created the famous sculpture of David. He replied by suggesting that it was 'just a matter of chipping away those bits that did not

look like David.’ I think that this is analogous to the development of self-awareness and have experienced many exercises that aim to deepen this core competence. I include several examples below without suggesting that self-awareness can be developed at one sitting. There are however times when a glimpse of new insight can lead to a productive and rapid phase of development.

The first exercise begins with the use of ones physical self and requires a certain suspension of assumptions:

“Sometimes it’s easier for people to understand suspension physically than conceptually. A very simple physical practice to appreciate suspension starts with sitting on a chair and grasping its sides. Now hold the sides of the chair more tightly. You might even imagine that there is no gravity, and that if you let go, you would float right up out of the chair. Notice, how your body feels as you hold tightly to the chair: the tension in your arms, your shoulders and your back, stomach and neck. Now release your hold on the chair. Feel all those muscles relax. Often we hold onto our thoughts in much the same way.”

Senge et al (2005: 29)

I particularly like the way that these authors finish by comparing physical holding to the way we can persist with our thoughts, as this seems to offer a useful backdrop to the domain of self-awareness. There are other exercises that appeal to a more mental experience as in my second example:

“As you read ... try to stand apart from yourself. Try to project your consciousness upward into a corner of the room and see yourself, in your minds eye, reading. Can you look at yourself almost as if you were someone else?

Now try something else. Think about the mood you are now in. Can you identify it? What are you feeling? How would you describe your present mental state? Now think for a minute about how your mind is working. Is it quite alert? Do you sense that you are torn between doing this exercise and evaluating the point to be made out of it?”

Covey (1989: 66)

I see that making assumptions is a barrier to self-awareness and that this in turn can prevent ones ability to be present to other people. In fact we can get so locked into our own thoughts that our capacity to be in relationship diminishes. I often use the following story to illustrate this point:

“A man wants to hang a picture. He has a nail but no hammer. The neighbour has one and our man decides to borrow it.

But then and there a doubt occurs to him: ‘What if the neighbour won’t let me have it? Yesterday he barely nodded when I greeted him. Perhaps he was in a hurry. But perhaps he pretended to be in a hurry because he does not like me. And why would he not like me? I have always been nice to him; he obviously imagines something. If someone wanted to borrow one of my tools, I would of course give it to him. So why doesn’t he want to lend me his hammer? How can one refuse such a simple request? People like him really poison one’s life. He probably even imagines that I depend on him just because he has a hammer. I’ll give him a piece of my mind!’

And so our man storms over to the neighbour’s apartment and rings the bell. The neighbour opens the door but before he can even say ‘Good morning,’ our man shouts, ‘And you can keep your damned hammer, you oaf!’ ... ”

Watzlawick (1983: 39).

In my experience this story nearly always helps individuals and groups to look again at their assumptions. I recall just one occasion when this back fired and I was unable to redirect the group from a lengthy and serious discussion about the merits, or otherwise, of borrowing and lending among neighbours. On that day I truly learned that no technique works in every situation!

The ‘Story of the Hammer’ is pertinent to the general point I am making in this section, that of offering ideas that may help facilitators to replace self-conscious distress with self-aware presence. Developing this aspect of their professional repertoire will in turn enable them to attend more acutely to the needs of other people. When I am distracted by my own thoughts, that may include negative expectations of the person(s) I am about to meet, I simply cannot connect with others and be fully present. I have realised that:

“We cannot easily think our way out of self-centredness. It is like trying to think one’s way out of unselfconsciousness. If one makes a determined effort to behave spontaneously, one will invariably come across as stilted and awkward.”

Radcliffe (2005: 132)

I suggest that one needs to commit to the work of increasing self-awareness in order to be an effective facilitator and my final point in this section is that this is clearly not entirely possible to achieve through individual effort. in a

vacuum, so to say. Learning about self comes in relationship to others, especially through their feedback. This can be increased through professionally constructed opportunities such as supervision and it is to this important practice that I turn next.

Presence Developed Through Supervision and Reflective Practice

Supervision is a core and essential adjunct to my practice and I have drawn attention to it at several points in my thesis. It means setting aside dedicated time in order to focus and reflect on practice, and to deliberately draw learning from the process. I have consistently invested time and money with a variety of different supervisors over the years of my work and see time spent with a supervisor as an oasis within which I can be both supported and challenged.

Bringing the ability to reflect into or close to my work, and using it as I do in the act of facilitating, brings an enhanced quality of practice that I now believe to be of crucial importance in the development of presence. This move is often referred to as a shift from reflecting on practice (past tense) to reflecting in practice (present tense). I am confident that developing such presence of mind improves the quality of ones work with people, whatever the setting.

There are many definitions of supervision and copious sources regarding roles, responsibilities and opportunities within the supervisory relationship. My own favourite books on the subject are:

1. Supervision in the Helping Professions – Peter Hawkins and Robin Shohet (2006)
2. Critical Reflection for Nursing and the Helping Professions: a user's guide – Gary Rolfe, Dawn Freshwater and Melanie Jasper (2001)

My own definition, drawn from experience and study, is that supervision is a conversation with a purpose, conducted in the context of a respectful relationship where one person is there to facilitate the best practice of others.

During my professional life I have mainly engaged in one to one supervision to support my role but am increasingly adding group supervision to my repertoire, particularly in relation to my group work. I realised that this was a gap during a two-day refresher course on facilitation skills that I attended in the latter part of my doctoral inquiry. As a result of this learning I have recently co-created a small group of peers to meet regularly and engage in mindful discussion regarding our experiences. I now believe that reflecting on my practice as a group facilitator is probably most appropriately done in a group setting as this provides a context that is consistent with the work. This parallel process enhances the potential benefits:

“ ... if the supervisees run groups, learning can be gained from the supervision taking place in a group with other group leaders. This provides opportunities to learn from how the supervisor runs the group and also how the dynamics of the presented groups are mirrored in the supervision group ... ”

Hawkins and Shohet (2006: 152)

In the context of the peer group noted above there is an equal responsibility to attend to boundaries, manage the group dynamic and share similarities and differences. This also provides a useful alternative to my individual supervision.

I have noted my increasing tendency to engage in such collaborative models of working and have referred to the Co-operative Inquiry I attended in New Zealand (March 2007), the Open Forum I currently facilitate in a hospice and the mindful discussion group I co-created with peers. In the same spirit I have for many years prioritised networking and now have a greater sense that this is an important investment of time and energy. All of these initiatives are examples of developments in my practice that I see as signposts to my future in which I anticipate a further move to less hierarchical modes of working.

Presence Supported by Feedback

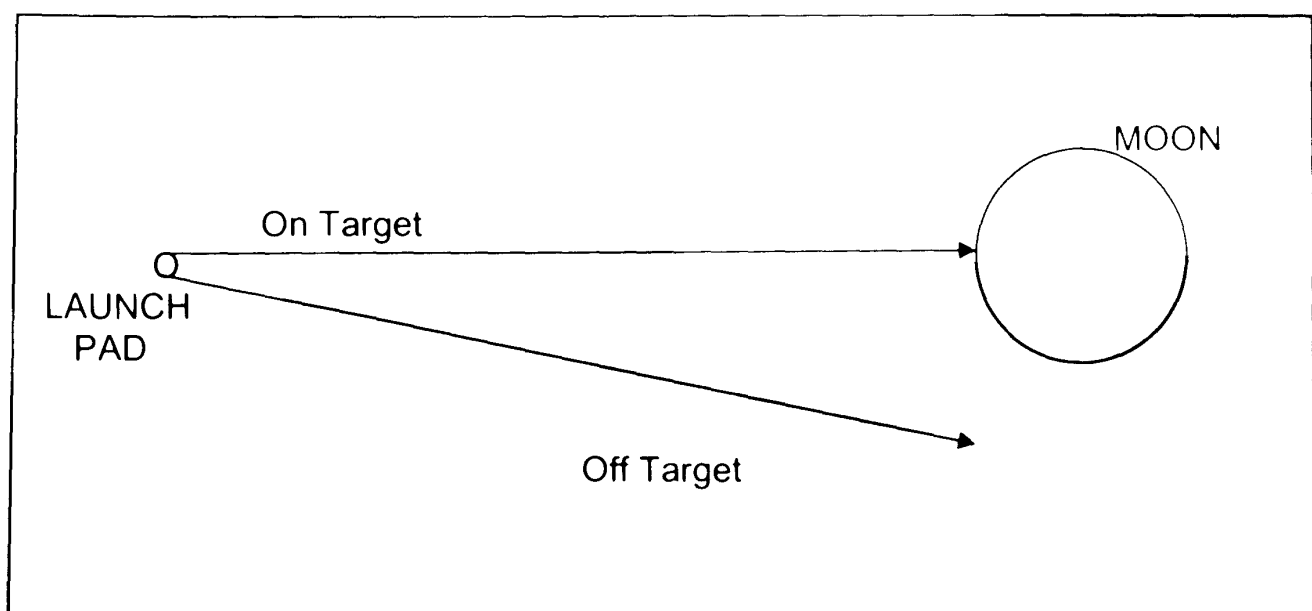
Whilst supervision is one type of constructed feedback there are a range of natural mental, physical and emotional mechanisms that prompt us to think

again, adjust our actions or maintain our equilibrium. If we can increase our awareness enough to note and attend to any necessary adjustments then our presence may be enhanced, and this can then be applied to the role of facilitator.

Psychological self-feedback may include internal monitoring questions that help us to judge whether we are retaining our authenticity or sticking to the goals that we have set, generally or in relation to a particular piece of work. Positive self-affirmations can offer a counterweight to any negativity emanating from our 'voice of judgement'.

Feedback from others can take many forms - it can be planned (through evaluation or appraisal), or spontaneous (arising from what is happening at the time). As a general rule, constructive and specific feedback is most useful and it is possible to take some control of this by asking for input on particular aspects of our behaviour, rather than requesting general comments that may not prove to be helpful.

At one level this is all rocket science! One concept that I frequently use in my work is the image of a rocket making a journey to the moon. The earlier in the journey that the spacecraft can get information to confirm that it remains on course, the better. If it is slightly off course at the start, a small adjustment is needed; if feedback is provided later then the adjustment needed is much bigger, as the diagram below shows:



A less obvious form of feedback is contained in posing great questions and it is to this developmental mode that I attend next.

Presence Encouraged Through Questions

“Good questions – ones that we care about and want to answer – call us outward and to each other. They are an invitation to explore, to venture out, to risk, to listen, to abandon our positions. Good questions help us to become both curious and uncertain, and this is always the road that opens us to the surprise of new insight.”

Wheatley, M., (2005: xi).

In the act of facilitating I have noticed that the more I can discover and utilise great questions - rather than attempting to provide great answers - the more effective my facilitation becomes. There is a specific link between this point and my experience of facilitator distress that converts to a Kaleidoscope idea. When I am in distress I have a tendency to look for answers. Sometimes I do this in a passive way, through internal conversation, whilst at other times I may prematurely try to ‘fix’ the group by making suggestions or unnecessarily filling a silence with my commentary. The box below contains an example of a great question that I was asked about my tendency to blame myself for group difficulties:

My friend and colleague Jeremy Keeley confronted my tendency to get enmeshed in certain group dynamics. As I described a recent situation he noticed that I seemed to assume that the problematic dynamic in the group I described was caused by something I had done or not done. His simple, direct and challenging question was “suppose it is not about you?” Any attempt by me to rationalise my position by explaining how I had concluded such a thing was gently and skilfully responded to by the same question.

Journal – 09/11/05

Byron Katie (2002) has developed four questions that help people to distinguish clearly between what is really true about the situation they are describing and what is based on imagination. Her first two questions

establish this clarity whilst the latter two help to develop a deeper sense of the experience of the speaker, at that moment and how they would want to be.

The four questions are:

- Is it true?
- Can you absolutely know it is true?
- How do you react when you have that thought?
- Who would you be without that thought?

Answers to the four questions are then challenged by the suggestion to 'turn around' the basic statement that led to the questions. For example, if the speaker started by complaining that 'he should care more', Katie suggests turning it round to become 'I should care more'. These questions, and the turn around technique are at the core of her approach, which she calls 'the Work'. This approach is applicable to use in reflecting on group-work in that I may reflect on a recent experience and be able to challenge any assumptions I have carried over, e.g. the group were angry, disinterested, satisfied, etc.

There are many other approaches to questions. For example some years ago I attended a 4-day course on Solution Focused Brief Therapy, from which I have carried two great questions that I frequently use in my practice. The first is the 'Miracle Question' and is intended to invoke the imagination of the client, particularly when their current situation is causing them distress. This question invites the client to describe in detail how their life would be without the problem. Whilst this approach was originally developed in a therapeutic context, I frequently use it to good effect across my professional practice. The question can certainly be applied to the experience of facilitator distress.

The second question is basically a self-assessment tool and can also be used in many circumstances. It asks the client to imagine a scale where 0 represents the worst that things have been and 10 represents the best, either from experience or as an aspiration. For example:

- 0 = always in distress as a facilitator
- 10 = always present enough to manage any distress that occurs

Scaling questions include:

- Where are you on the scale just now?
- What is stopping things getting worse?
- How would you know if you moved one point, either way?
- What point would represent 'good enough'?

I have successfully used these questions across a range of settings and particularly like the way that they promote self-assessment, as I believe that this is more empowering than external diagnosis, especially in the field of human relations.

Overall it has been my experience that finding the right question, at the right time, is part of the alchemy of facilitation. Questions that support and challenge, offer subtle feedback and help to deepen ones inquiry into facilitation are all useful in the ongoing task of developing practice and presence. Once again, concepts of professional development (of the facilitator) and practice development (within the client system) are closely aligned.

Presence Through Learning

There have been many learning opportunities that I have taken to support my developing presence as a facilitator. Overall I suggest that finding and taking opportunities to learn is vital to the aspiring facilitator, who must move beyond the natural state of self-awareness and develop this to a new level, in order to take on the professional role of facilitator. In the pages above I have referred to supervision and other forms of feedback, the power of great questions and the development of self-awareness – I regard all of these as sources of learning. I have also given a brief summary of the many formal and informal

educational and professional development opportunities I have taken, which I regard as building blocks to my presence.

I make the space here to include one further and particular learning exercise as it captures the spirit of all that I seek to achieve as a facilitator. It is creative, pertinent to the issue at hand, and was delivered by one of the most present facilitators I have had the fortune to experience.

As my inquiry progressed I realised that presence exists most easily when the facilitator is distress free, hence the natural shift in the focus of my inquiry. The following exercise can help us to learn about what triggers our distress or in common psychological parlance 'presses our buttons'.

Eric Cassirer was a skilled facilitator I witnessed at first hand during my Humanistic Psychology training. He was with a group when he constructed an exercise where participants took an imaginary button out of the imaginary bowl that he was holding. He then asked them to talk about their button and describe what happens to them when their button is pressed. He then invited all participants to take every opportunity during the programme to press each other's button. The challenge, for the one on the receiving end of such a stimulus, was to find a new way of responding.

With thanks to the late Eric Cassirer

Cassirer is one of many facilitators who have influenced me throughout my career: some have inspired through direct, experiential contact, whilst others have done so through their writing. As my approach seeks to be comprehensive in both an academic sense and with regard to my general professional approach, I include several inspirational passages from the work of people I have not met. I see these as protracted examples of the wealth of material utilised throughout my thesis.

Presence Encouraged Through Inspirational Writing

Although it is arguable whether these passages invoke presence in the reader or listener they are, for me, imbued with the presence of the writer. Such

passages can sometimes bridge a gap in understanding by alluding poetically or metaphorically to the issue presented by the client or group, raising hope and offering subtle guidance. The person commonly connected to the first passage has been one of the most present people on the planet in my lifetime - Nelson Mandela used these words as part of his acceptance speech, when he became President of South Africa. This passage seems to me to be a call to presence:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

Williamson (1992: 130)

The next piece is quite different; it is a wry look at life taken from a short book entitled *Knots*. Sometimes, as I facilitate, the group has expectations that I cannot meet. I may tell myself that I should know what to do but this does not help and my sense uncertainty, anxiety, and fearfulness increase. If these moments collide in my own mind with an exaggerated sense of having to meet others' expectations (usually related to the fact that I am being paid to be there as facilitator) then a vicious circle is set up:

*“There is something I don't know
That I am supposed to know
I don't know what it is I don't know
And I feel I look stupid
If I seem both not to know it
And not to know what it is I don't know.
Therefore I pretend I know it.
This is nerve racking
Since I don't know what I must pretend to know.
Therefore I pretend to know everything.
I feel you know what I am supposed to know*

*But you can't tell me what it is
Because you don't know that I don't know what it is.
You may know what I don't know, but not
That I don't know it,
And I can't tell you. So you will have to tell me everything."*

Laing (1972: 56)

Notwithstanding the knotted thinking so eloquently expressed by Laing, I remain hopeful that there are ways of holding a stance of not knowing whilst simultaneously remaining present as a facilitator. Becoming lost in the vicious circle is certainly not helpful and probably not necessary. One can only do ones best; it is not possible to do more.

Whilst opportunities to learn should not be avoided or denied the starting point that I propose is optimistically expressed by stance Harvey Jackins in my third sample of inspirational writing:

*"Every single Human Being
at every moment of the past,
if the entire situation is taken into account,
has always done the best he or she could do,
and so deserves neither blame nor reproach
from anyone including self.
This in particular is true of you."*

Jackins (1965)

Presence Through Writing

One of the ways in which writing can inspire is to encourage the reader to follow suit and express their own ideas; this can be through the use of words, as in my case, or through other creative media. The process of writing morning pages has been a powerfully useful tool in helping me to develop my presence, and I have enthusiastically suggested it to others. Taking up this suggestion must be done in the light of a realistic ambition and expectation.

"When you write, don't say, 'I'm going to write a poem.' That attitude will freeze you right away. Sit down with the least expectation of yourself; say, 'I am free to write the worst junk in the world.' You have to give yourself the space to write a lot without a destination ... If every time you sat down, you expected something great, writing would

always be a great disappointment. Plus that expectation would also keep you from writing."

Goldberg (1986: 11)

I have found that writers concur that there is no substitute for simply making the time to write, on a regular basis, and as a disciplined, rather than spontaneous activity. The principle of making time to write, on a regular or even mechanical basis has been the single most useful technique I have used to guide my inquiry and ultimately my presence. I am grateful for the optimistic encouragement of Julia Cameron whose own writing has been so instrumental in enabling my own. She says that:

"Anyone who faithfully writes morning pages will be led to a connection with a source of wisdom within."

Cameron (1993: 15)

I cannot say whether this is true for everyone but I am sure that I have arrived at this point with a far greater knowledge of what was previously hidden within me. This claim may be the most appropriate point to move on to my last key section: the issue of judgement. This has been a question that I raised at a very early stage, in my inquiry and in the task of writing this thesis.

WHAT JUDGEMENT CRITERIA CAN BE APPLIED TO AUTOETHNOGRAPHY?

I considered positioning this section near the beginning of this thesis, as a way of demonstrating my willingness to be open to question. I was concerned that placing this critical section at the end may suggest an attempt to hide from any difficulties raised. The methodology section may also have been an appropriate 'container', given that autoethnography itself remains open to question, in terms of its claims to be research. Ultimately I decided that this section belonged near the end of the document.

I anticipate that having reached this point the reader will probably have formed opinions on the way that my thinking has developed, throughout my inquiry, and this is likely to inform any judgement that they make regarding the piece of work as a whole.

I suggest that autoethnography remains a challenge within the field of orthodox research, including the qualitative traditions, in that it claims legitimacy for what some researchers dismiss as stories. However, I have been sensitive and committed, throughout my inquiry, to suggestions about how my work may be judged and hope to make a contribution to the body of knowledge regarding this matter.

The issue of judgement criteria across the field of qualitative research is a thorny one, provoking heated debate and some controversy. Patton (2002) gave me a useful direction pointer in an example drawn from the field of evaluation:

" ... where evaluation reports are concerned, the possibility of fiction is always a subtext."

Patton (2002: 87)

This author cites others who suggest that narrative approaches look like fiction because they *are* fiction, and this suspicion emphasises the importance of clear judgement and attention to the related question of where the judges of

this type of work may be located. The recent development of the DProf makes a deliberate shift towards preparing 'scholarly professionals', but those engaged on the programme are currently supervised and/or examined by academics from a more traditional educational background. I have wondered whether this means that the new style of doctorate will be judged by old criteria, and if so, what impact this may have. The thoughts expressed by John Heron a decade ago remain pertinent:

"Academic institutions are still closed to the integration of intellectual learning with experiential and practical learning."

Heron (1998: 15)

One example of tradition meeting modern occurred, quite unexpectedly, at a social function:

I recall being at a social gathering and describing my research to a traditional scientist who responded to my description with a throw away comment, "Ah, one of those trendy new doctorates". Maybe I was over-sensitive but this comment stuck with me as an interesting response that suggested the existence of academic one-upmanship.

Journal – 15/07/06

This sentiment was echoed when I began to express my excitement regarding my early discovery of autoethnography. I experienced a collective intake of breath from those around me, including academics who, I assumed, would be my judges at the end of the programme. I can understand the scepticism behind the reactions above and it would be disingenuous of me to be too defensive in my response in view of my own concerns regarding the claims of autoethnography.

Unlike traditional research, the aim of autoethnography is not always explicit from the outset, and it is difficult to imagine how it could be. It is important to move beyond negative judgement that is based on the premise that 'it is not like the old days' whilst also balancing a respectful consideration of those expressing such a view and attention to any deeper misgiving that they may be striving to articulate.

It has occurred to me that seeking recognition from a university prioritises acceptance and ratification by others over claiming personal authority. There is something awkward about seeking legitimacy from the very system of thinking that one is trying to challenge. At one stage I described this struggle as my Marxist period, referring to the comedian Groucho Marx, who was said to have expressed his uncertainty about joining a club that would have him as a member!

Overall the innovative development of a Professional Doctorate suggests willingness within Bournemouth University to be actively involved in bridging the gap between theory and practice. The openness that I experienced in this institution has been influential in my decision to take an autoethnographic approach.

So how should this work be judged, and by whom? Is it appropriate for the autoethnographer to claim legitimacy on his or her terms? Noy (2003) expresses the dilemma of who may judge this type of work rather succinctly, commenting:

“When he hands me back a few chapters he read, I hear my advisor quietly muttering: ‘Good work, good work, but who should be its judges.’”

Noy (2003: 10)

If such work is to be judged by others then there may be an associated issue of how researchers can remain open and non-defensive whilst simultaneously defending their work. I have attempted to critically analyse whether I am really open to comments and challenge, since I have frequently heard myself, and others, make statements about welcoming feedback, only to respond defensively to any hint of criticism.

I am concerned that autoethnographic work is somehow beyond the judgement of others, although my uncertainty is based on the dubious ground of instinct. I do, however, tentatively propose that there may be an unspoken assumption that one cannot doubt another's expression of experience. It is

possible that the personal nature of narrative reporting disallows critique to some extent.

At one level the issue of judgement is not my concern, but I do see it as my responsibility to contribute something to the debate. In fact, submitting a thesis could be construed as an act of self-judgement. Taylor (2007) argues for the importance of such self-assessment:

“A dilemma is apparent: if you are not fit to be regarded as an educated person in relation to your own learning until someone else tells you that you have achieved the desired state, then how and when do you assume authority over the bigger and more complex matters that affect your own life.”

Taylor (2007: 44)

To summarise: whatever the academic debate in the research world at large, I have engaged with two assessment questions that emerged earlier in my inquiry, soon after I had committed to my methodological choice:

- 1) Is it possible to judge an autoethnography?
- 2) How is it to be judged?

I quickly decided that it was indeed possible to judge an autoethnography and have therefore focused on the second question and note that making a contribution to knowledge is an integral requirement at this level of academic award and is consistent with my general commitment to developing practical knowledge. I suggest that the overriding judgement criterion for the professional doctorate is to establish whether it contributes to practice; in my case this aspiration includes both autoethnography and facilitation.

Given that my priority is practice development, I have consistently attempted to navigate the boundary between my own developing practice (professional development) and the impact I have made on others. My work usually entails facilitating groups and individuals as they seek to maintain and develop best practice. The extent to which I have improved my ability to facilitate is therefore a specific question that must be addressed when judging my thesis.

I have adopted a strategy of being open to assessment throughout the process of the doctorate. This stance supports my assertion that the activity of reviewing has been central to my inquiry, rather than separated out as a stand-alone section. In the context of writing my thesis, this openness to judgement means paying attention to the potential reader. I have particularly held this point in mind through using a reflective and reflexive stance. My hope is that this will enable the reader to see the way in which my thinking has developed:

“ ... purpose and audience deserve special emphasis in the case of qualitative studies, where the criteria for judging quality may be poorly understood or in dispute ... ”

Patton (2002: 12)

As an ongoing commitment to openness I have created many opportunities to open up my work to the judgement of others, including:

1. Sharing what I was doing through conversation with colleagues
2. Creating and co-facilitating workshops on the subject of facilitator distress and presence
3. Submitting samples of my work in progress, to supervisors and peers, for review and critical comments
4. Through my academic and professional supervision process.

These activities support the general position that I have adopted throughout my work: that judgement is a process and that early and ongoing feedback mechanisms allow for subtle changes throughout the journey. As a result my practice has shown incremental development and this document is littered with examples. The workshops I have co-facilitated and my increasingly creative approach to writing are tangible manifestations of this development and underpin the more difficult to articulate sense of confidence I now feel when I am working with groups.

The issue of judgement moves from such formative concerns to a summative question in the act of submitting the completed thesis for the judgement of others. There are general questions to be found in the literature that may help

to guide thinking in this respect. For example Richardson (2000: 923) lists and explores five criteria by which she reviews papers submitted to her, prior to publication. The criteria are:

- Substantive contribution – does the work contribute to our understanding?
- Aesthetic merit – is the text artistically shaped?
- Reflexivity – is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure?
- Impact – does this affect me, does it generate new questions?
- Expression of a reality – does it seem to be a true and credible account?

These broad questions are appropriate to the field of autoethnography, in which there is a further issue, regarding the use of self, that must be addressed. In relation to this point there are other questions that may help the reader/judge to see the extent to which my self-as-researcher adds to the inquiry or, alternatively, distracts. These questions include:

- To what degree does my work move beyond the self of the author (me) to reach out to the other (you)?
- Does my work appear to be self-conscious or self-aware?
- Do you notice a self-obsessed or self-disclosing style?
- Are there exclamation marks where there should be question marks?
(Alternatively are there question marks, literal or implied, where there should be more certainty?)

These questions are equally applicable to my presence as a facilitator. My presence with groups and individuals is inextricably linked to my plausibility, the sense of trust between the people I facilitate and myself. I might ask similar questions, such as:

- Am I an 'honest broker', working from an unaligned position (or expressing any alignment I may have, clearly and openly)?
- Am I congruent – or do my words say one thing and my body language betray a different story?

And so, within the broader range of questions offered above, there has been one that has intrigued me the most. Throughout my inquiry the question of plausibility has been my outstanding concern. My key question is 'Does my writing ring true' and lies at the heart of my research.

I believe that it does, otherwise I would not be submitting for examination but I cannot be the sole judge. I can say that my thesis is not a work of fiction, but is wrought from the depths (and shallows) of my experience:

“ ... one major difference that separates fiction writing from science writing. The difference is not whether the text really is fiction or non-fiction; rather, the difference is the claim that the author makes for the text.”

Richardson and Adams St. Pierre (2005: 961)

DRAWING THE STRINGS TOGETHER

The completion of my thesis and claim to have reached doctoral standard is not the end of my work. Looking to the future I am sure that this will mutate into other forms, in my post-doctoral work and, by extension, in the practice of others. I have a clear and stated intention to develop the Iceberg Model and Kaleidoscope Section in the next phase of my professional career. I hope that this ongoing work will provide new insights into old problems and I share the aspiration of a fellow autoethnographer, as follows:

“My (last) hope was that while engaging the work, readers would transform from commentators or critics, reading an account of the development of a hypothesis, into readers who moved along ‘with’ the work ... following how I was trying to create meaning and meaningfulness, however idiosyncratic and fragile the path.”

Noy (2003: 10)

This call to the collaborative marks the end of my doctoral inquiry. All that remains is to offer some thoughts on potential for the many further areas for study that have emerged within my inquiry. Some I have referred to as ‘stones unturned’, others that could be developed into an alternative thesis, and still more that I regard as signposts to my future practice. The latter category includes:

- Adding non-verbal techniques to my facilitation
- Developing my practical understanding of the transpersonal field
- Developing my Iceberg Model, in conjunction with a more comprehensive Kaleidoscope of related ideas

A major gap in this work is that I have paid little attention to facilitated distress. I recall the first time I was asked to facilitate a group discussion. I met the person who had asked me to do this work just before going to meet the group to be facilitated. I recall her last words as I left her office for the short corridor walk to the group, *“Don’t forget – they will be marginally more nervous than you!”*

This is something I have often remembered. In the life of groups, distress is certainly not confined to the facilitator. It is not my purpose here to develop this theme, but I will now, in my practice as a facilitator, remember more clearly that the experience of being facilitated is not always an easy, tolerable or even acceptable experience. I am sure that this insight and resolve has been influenced by this inquiry into my own distress and my search to be more present. It is important to remember that facilitation, rather like policing, can only be done by consent. If individuals within the group, or the whole group, refuse to be facilitated then facilitation will not occur. I believe that the points made in this paragraph could be developed into another thesis entirely!

It is tempting at this stage to try to end with a flourish, but I am guided by the following advice:

“Give serious thought to dropping the idea that your final chapter must lead to a conclusion or that the account must lead to a dramatic climax ... In reporting qualitative work, I avoid the term conclusion. I do not want to work toward a grand flourish that might tempt me beyond the boundaries of the material I have been collecting ... ”

Wolcott (1990: 55)

As I draw the strings of my thesis together I imagine a ball of wool shortly after a kitten has played with it. The apparent ending is leading me to new beginnings and I am determined to develop parts of this thesis in different forms, not least within my practice as a facilitator.

“Sooner or later we admit that we cannot do it all, that whatever our contribution, the story is much larger and longer than our own, and we are all in the gift of older stories that we are only now joining.”

Whyte (2001: 49)

As I left the telling of my autoethnography in the hands of the examiners I took on a quite different challenge, possibly as an antidote to the academic learning in which I had engaged for such a long period. I learned to ride a bicycle! The pleasure I experienced at my success in overcoming fears stretching back decades, and beliefs about my ability to balance and coordinate my body in a seemingly unnatural combination of limb movement and trunk stillness, eclipsed any satisfaction I had on bringing my thesis to

completion. On reflection this was, for me, the most wonderful example of 'whole person learning', and one that promises great enjoyment for years to come.

*"It's a journey with my soul that I am taking
One that only goes
from the cradle to the grave.
Going round in circles
like painted dancing horses.
Up and down we ride
on the wooden courses".*

From 'Unfinished Life', words and music by Kate Wolf (1981). Another Sundown Publishing Co.

Endnote

I recall working with a woman who was gripped with anxiety. As we talked I offered a specific idea (x) that she might try to alleviate her symptoms. On one occasion the conversation went something like this:

Steve: "Have you thought of trying ... x"
Woman: "Yes Doctor"
Steve: "I'm not a doctor, I'm a nurse"
Woman: "Yes Nurse"
Steve: "Please call me Steve."

Later in the meeting we hit a point of particular difficulty when her anxiety was very present in the room. From within this anxiety she responded to a comment I made saying:

"Yes, Doctor, Nurse, Steve."

I have never forgotten this incident. From within this difficult time for her she may have seen forward 20 years! Either way, we both laughed at the struggle she was having and this became a turning point for our, hopefully therapeutic, relationship.

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